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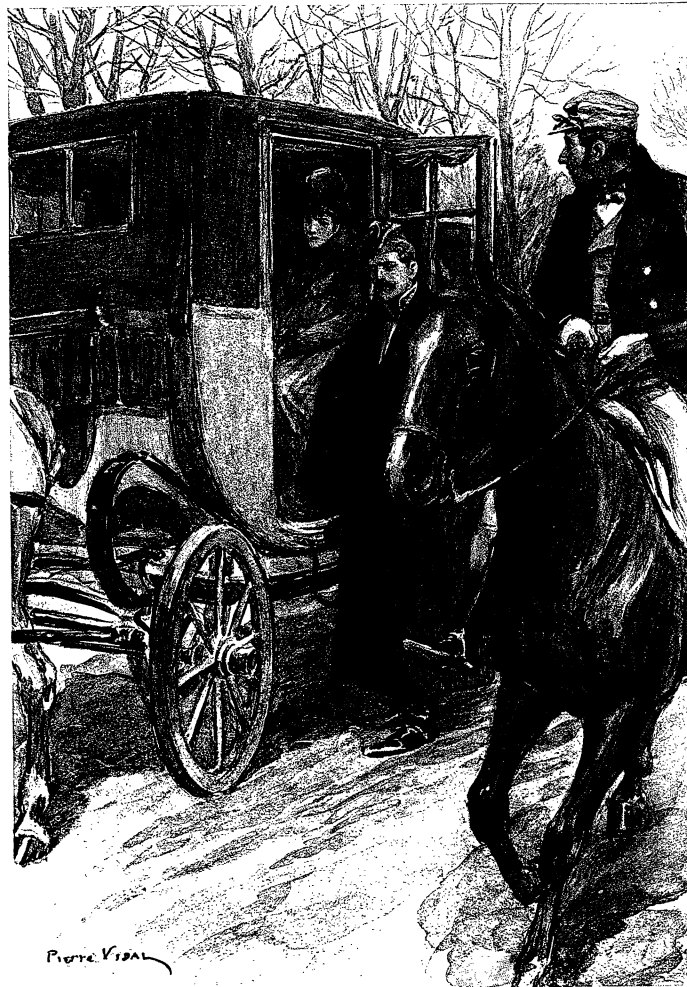
A WOMAN OF THIRTY

MASSIMILLA DONI

HONORINE







*“When the prisoner passed the calèche, he cast his eyes  
within.”*

A Woman of Thirty. Page 24.



LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE  
OF  
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

*A WOMAN OF THIRTY*  
*MASSIMILLA DONI*  
*HONORINE*

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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“A WOMAN OF THIRTY,” the most important story in this volume of *La Comédie Humaine*, was written in the years 1830 to 1834, and in the Calmann-Lévy edition of Balzac is placed immediately after “A Daughter of Eve” in “Scenes from Private Life.” “Honorine” (1843) is in the same group just after “Béatrix,” and “Massimilla Doni” (1839) is found in the “Philosophical Studies.”



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A WOMAN OF THIRTY.

To  
LOUIS BOULANGER  
PAINTER



## A WOMAN OF THIRTY.



### I.

#### FIRST ERRORS.

EARLY in the month of April, 1813, there came a Sunday morning that promised one of those fine days when the Parisians, for the first time in the year, see their sidewalks without mud and their sky without clouds. Just before noon a cabriolet drawn by two high-stepping horses turned into rue de Rivoli from rue de Castiglione, and stopped behind several other carriages standing in front of the newly opened gateway in the centre of the Terrasse des Feuillants. This light vehicle was driven by a man of careworn and sickly aspect; the sparse grizzled hair hardly covered his yellow skull and caused him to look prematurely old. He threw the reins to the mounted servant who followed the carriage, and alighted, to take in his arms a young girl whose dainty beauty attracted the attention of the idlers walking on the terrace.

The small person obligingly allowed herself to be taken about the waist when she stood on the edge of the carriage and put her arms round her companion's neck, who thereupon deposited her on the sidewalk without so much as rumpling the trimming of her green rep dress. A lover would not have taken so much pains. The stranger was evidently the father of that child, who, without thanking

him, took his arm in familiar fashion and led him quickly into the garden.

The old father observed the admiring glances of a number of young men, and the melancholy expression of his face disappeared for a moment. Although he had long since reached the age at which man should be content with the delusive pleasures afforded by vanity, he began to smile.

"They think you 're my wife," he said in the girl's ear, straightening himself up and walking with a moderation which made her fume.

He seemed to treat his daughter with a sort of coquetry, and perchance he enjoyed more than she the glances cast by the bystanders at her little feet shod in boots of puce-colored leather, at a most graceful figure outlined by a dress with a flounced waist, and at a white neck which an embroidered collar did not wholly conceal. The motion of walking raised the hem of the girl's dress and revealed, above the boots, a shapely leg in an openwork silk stocking.

So it was that more than one promenader sauntered past the couple, to admire, or simply to see again, the youthful face about which played curls of brown hair, and whose pink and white freshness was heightened as much by the reflection of the pink satin lining of a dainty hood as by the impatience and eagerness which sparkled in every one of the pretty maid's features. A gentle petulance enlivened her lovely almond-shaped black eyes, surmounted by gracefully arched eyebrows, bordered by long lashes, and swimming in transparent fluid. Youth and vigorous life displayed their treasures on that pouting face, and on a bust still of graceful outline, despite the fact that the girdle was then worn directly beneath the bosom.

Insensible to the homage of admiration, the girl gazed

with a sort of anxiety at the château of the Tuileries, evidently the goal of her impatient journey. It was a quarter to twelve. Early as it was, several women, all of whom had desired to show themselves in their fine gowns, were coming away from the château, turning their heads from time to time with a discontented air, as if they regretted having arrived too late for a spectacle they had longed to see.

A word or two, prompted by the ill-humor of those disappointed fair ones, and caught on the wing by the pretty new-comer, disturbed her strangely. The old man watched with an eye rather curious than quizzical the signs of impatience and alarm which played upon his companion's lovely face, and observed her with too much interest, perhaps, not to be impelled by some paternal *arrière pensée*.

This was the thirteenth Sunday of the year 1813. Two days later Napoleon was to start upon that fatal campaign during which he was destined to lose Bessières and Duroc, to win the memorable battles of Lützen and Bautzen, to find himself betrayed by Austria, Saxony, Bavaria, and by Bernadotte, and to fight the terrible battle of Leipzig. The magnificent review ordered by the Emperor was to be the last of those military displays which retained for so many years the admiration of Parisians and strangers. The Old Guard was to execute for the last time the skilful manœuvres whose brilliancy and precision sometimes amazed even that giant himself, who was then preparing for his duel with Europe. A melancholy presentiment brought a brilliant and curious throng to the Tuileries. Every one seemed to divine the future, and to foresee that the imagination would have occasion more than once to picture that scene anew, when those heroic days of France should take on, as they have to-day, an almost fabulous tinge.

"Please let 's go faster, father!" said the girl, crossly, hurrying the old man on; "I hear the drums."

"It's the troops entering the Tuileries," he replied.

"Or leaving — everybody's coming away!" she retorted, with a childish bitterness that made the old man smile.

"The review does n't begin till half-past twelve," said he, walking almost behind his impetuous offspring.

From the way that she swung his right arm you would have said that she was helping him to run. Her little hand, well gloved, impatiently crumpled a handkerchief, and resembled the prow of a vessel breasting the waves. The old man smiled at times, but at times, too, a careworn expression flitted across his wrinkled face. His love for the bewitching creature caused him to admire the present as much as he dreaded the future. He seemed to say to himself, "She is happy to-day; will she be so always?" For old men are much inclined to embellish with their griefs the future of the young.

When the father and daughter reached the peristyle of the pavilion at the summit of which the tricolored flag was waving, and through which people pass from the garden of the Tuileries to the Carrousel, the sentries shouted to them in a stern tone, "No passing here!"

The child raised herself on the tips of her toes and was able to catch a glimpse of a multitude of handsomely dressed women crowding both sides of the old marble archway through which the Emperor was to come forth.

"You see, father, we started too late!"

Her mortified little pout showed how much importance she attached to being present at the review.

"Well, Julie, let 's go away; you don't like to be crushed in a crowd."

"Let's stay, father. I can at least see the Emperor from here; if he should die during the campaign, I should never have seen him."

The father started at those selfish words; his daughter had tears in her voice; he looked at her and fancied that he could detect beneath her lowered eyelids tears due not so much to her disappointment as to one of those first griefs the secret of which is easily guessed by an elderly father.

Suddenly Julie flushed, and uttered an exclamation, the meaning of which was understood neither by the sentries nor by the old man. At the exclamation, an officer, who was hurrying from the courtyard to the staircase, turned quickly, walked toward the archway leading to the garden, recognized the young woman who had been hidden momentarily by the great bearskin shakos of the grenadiers, and instantly caused the orders, which he himself had given, to be suspended for her and her father. Then, heedless of the mutterings of the fashionably dressed crowd besieging the archway, he gently drew the delighted child to his side.

"I no longer wonder at her anger or her eagerness, as you are on duty," said the old man to the officer, in a half-serious, half-jesting tone.

"Monsieur le duc," replied the young man, "if you want good places, let's not waste time in talking. The Emperor does n't like to wait, and I am ordered by the Grand Marshal to go and notify him."

As he spoke, he had taken Julie's arm with a measure of familiarity, and was leading her swiftly toward the Carrousel. Julie was amazed to see the immense crowd compressed into the narrow space between the gray walls of the palace and the posts, connected by chains, which form

great gravelled squares in the centre of the courtyard of the Tuileries. The cordon of sentinels stationed to keep a passageway clear for the Emperor and his staff had much difficulty to avoid being swept aside by that compact crowd, which buzzed like a swarm of bees.

"Will it be very fine?" queried Julie, with a smile.

"Look out!" cried the officer, seizing her by the waist and lifting her with a powerful and swift movement to place her beside a column.

But for this abrupt manœuvre his inquiring kinswoman would have been hit by the rump of the white charger arrayed in a saddle of green velvet and gold which Napoleon's Mameluke held by the bridle, almost under the archway, ten paces in rear of the horses awaiting the grand officials of the Empire, the Emperor's companions. The young man placed the father and daughter beside the first post on the right, in front of the crowd, and entrusted them by a motion of the head to two old grenadiers between whom they found themselves.

When the officer returned to the palace, a happy, joyous expression had succeeded on his face the sudden look of alarm caused by the backing of the horse. Julie had secretly pressed his hand, perhaps to thank him for the trifling service he had rendered her, or to say to him, "So I am going to see you at last!" She bent her head slightly in response to the respectful salutation which the officer bestowed upon her and her father alike before he hurriedly disappeared. The old man, who apparently had left the young people together by design, maintained a serious attitude, standing just behind his daughter; but he watched her stealthily, and tried to inspire her with a false security by seeming to be absorbed in contemplation of the magnificent spectacle presented by the Carrousel.

When she turned upon him the glance of a schoolgirl disturbed concerning her teacher, the old man replied with a smile of good-humored amusement; but his piercing eye had followed the officer under the archway, and no detail of the brief scene had escaped him.

"What a beautiful sight!" said Julie in a low voice, pressing her father's hand.

The picturesque and splendid aspect of the Carrousel at that moment caused that exclamation to be uttered by thousands of spectators gazing in open-mouthed admiration. Another line of people, fully as compact as that in which the old man and his daughter were placed, filled the narrow paved space that extends along the iron fence of the Carrousel in a line parallel with the château. This crowd designed brilliantly, by the many-colored dresses of the women, the fourth side of the vast oblong parallelogram formed by the buildings of the Tuileries and by this fence, then very recently erected.

The regiments of the Old Guard which were to pass in review filled that immense square, where they stood in imposing blue lines, ten files deep, facing the palace. Beyond the enclosure and in the Carrousel were drawn up, in other parallel lines, several regiments of infantry and artillery, ready to march under the triumphal arch which adorns the centre of the fence, and upon whose crest were to be seen, at this time, the superb horses from Venice. The bands of the regiments, stationed at the foot of the galleries of the Louvre, were hidden by the Polish lancers.

A large part of the gravelled enclosure was left unoccupied, as a stage for the evolutions of those silent corps whose serried masses, arranged with the symmetry of true military art, reflected the sunbeams in the triangular fiery surfaces of the thousand bayonets. The light air, blowing

upon the plumes of the soldiers, caused them to bend like the trees of the forest before a high wind. Those veteran troops, mute and resplendent, presented innumerable contrasts of color due to the diversity of their uniforms, trimmings, weapons, and shoulder-straps.

This vast tableau, a miniature of a field of battle before the battle begins, was poetically framed, with all its curious accessories and inequalities, by the lofty, majestic edifices, whose immobility seemed to be copied by the officers and their troops. The spectator instinctively compared those walls of men with those other walls of stone. The spring sun, casting its beams lavishly on the white walls built but a day before and on the walls hoary with age, lighted perfectly those numberless tanned faces, all of which told of perils encountered and gravely awaited the perils to come.

The colonels of the various regiments rode to and fro alone before the ranks formed by those heroic men. And behind the masses of troops striped with blue, purple, silver, and gold, the spectators could see the tricolored streamers attached to the lances of the six tireless Polish horsemen, who, like dogs guiding a flock through a field, galloped incessantly between the troops and the crowd, to prevent the latter from overstepping the narrow space allotted to them near the imperial gateway.

But for these movements one might have fancied one's self in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. The spring breeze, passing over the bearskin shakos of the grenadiers, attested the immobility of their wearers, just as the murmurs of the crowd intensified their silence. Only at rare intervals the clash of a Chinese bell, or a slight blow inadvertently struck upon a bass drum and repeated by the echoes of the imperial palace, resembled the peals of distant thunder which announce a coming storm.



An indescribable enthusiasm was manifest in the suspense of the multitude. France was about to bid farewell to Napoleon, on the eve of a campaign whose perils were foreseen by the humblest citizen. This time the question was, for the French Empire, to be or not to be. That thought seemed to animate the civilian throng and the military throng which stood elbow to elbow, equally silent, in the enclosure over which soared the eagle and the genius of Napoleon. Those soldiers, the hope of France, the last drop of her blood, also counted for much in the anxious curiosity of the spectators. Between most of the latter and the troops farewells were being said, perhaps forever; but all hearts, even those most hostile to the Emperor, offered up to Heaven fervent prayers for the glory of the fatherland. The men who were most weary of the struggle between Europe and France had laid aside their hatred as they passed beneath the triumphal arch, realizing that in the day of peril Napoleon was all France.

The clock on the château struck the half-hour. On the instant the murmuring of the crowd ceased, and the silence became so intense that one could have heard the whisper of a child. The old man and his daughter, who seemed alive only in their eyes, heard a jangling of spurs and a clashing of swords beneath the echoing peristyle of the château.

A small man, rather stout, clad in a green uniform, with white breeches and high boots, suddenly appeared, keeping on his head a three-cornered chapeau as famous as the man himself; the broad red ribbon of the Legion of Honor lay across his breast, and he wore a small sword at his side. The man was descried by every eye, and at the same instant, from every part of the square. The drums at once beat the charge; the two orchestras began with a strain

whose bellicose tone was taken up by all the instruments in unison, from the softest flute to the bass drum. At this warlike appeal every heart quivered, the colors were dipped, the troops presented arms, with a simultaneous, regular movement which extended from the muskets in the front rank to those in the last rank in the Carrousel. Words of command passed from rank to rank like echoes. Shouts of "Vive l'empereur!" rose from the wildly enthusiastic multitude. In short, the whole square quivered and stirred to life.

Napoleon had mounted his horse. That movement had revived those silent masses, had given voices to the instruments, an impulsion to the eagles and standards, and had made every face alive with excitement. The walls of the high galleries of the old palace seemed also to shout, "Vive l'empereur!" It was like nothing human — it was sorcery, a simulacrum of the divine power, or, rather, a fleeting image of that fleeting reign.

The man so encompassed about by love and enthusiasm and devotion and prayers, for whom the sun had driven the clouds from the sky, sat upon his horse, three paces in front of the small gold-bedizened band that escorted him, with the Grand Marshal on his left and the marshal on duty on his right. Amid that tempest of emotion aroused by him his face showed no sign of emotion.

"Oh! mon Dieu, yes! At Moscow, in the hottest of the fire, at the Moskowa among the dead, he was always as calm as Baptiste, *he* was!"

This reply to numerous questions was made by the grenadier who stood near the girl. For a moment Julie was lost in contemplation of that face, whose tranquillity indicated such confidence in the security of his power. The Emperor noticed Mademoiselle de Chatillonest, and,

leaning toward Duroc, said a few words which made the Grand Marshal smile.

The evolutions began. Whereas hitherto the young woman had divided her attention between the impassive features of Napoleon and the blue, green, and red lines of the troops, at this moment she was almost exclusively engrossed, amid the rapid and regular manœuvres executed by the veterans, by a young officer who rode swiftly among the moving lines and returned with untiring activity to the group at whose head the simply clad figure of Napoleon shone resplendent. This officer was riding a magnificent black horse, and could be distinguished readily amid that bedizened multitude by the beautiful sky-blue uniform of the Emperor's orderly officers. His embroideries sparkled so brightly in the sun, and the aigrette of his tall, narrow shako reflected its rays so brilliantly, that the spectators might well have compared him to a will-of-the-wisp, to a visible spirit entrusted by the Emperor with the duty of inspiring and leading those battalions whose undulating weapons flashed flame, when, at a mere look from his eyes, they broke ranks, re-formed, and whirled about like the eddies of a whirlpool, or passed before him like the long, straight, lofty lines of foam which the ocean in wrath hurls upon its shores.

When the evolutions were at an end, the orderly dashed off at full speed, and halted before the Emperor to wait his commands. At that moment he was within twenty steps of Julie, facing the imperial group, in an attitude not unlike that given by Gérard to General Rapp, in his picture of the battle of Austerlitz; so that the girl had an opportunity to admire her lover in all his military magnificence. Colonel Victor d'Aiglemont, at this time barely thirty years of age, was tall, slender, and well built, and

his harmonious proportions never showed to better advantage than when he exerted his strength to manage a horse whose graceful and supple back seemed to bend beneath him. His strong dark face possessed that inexplicable attraction which perfect regularity of feature imparts to youthful faces. His forehead was broad and high. His flashing eyes, surmounted by dense eyebrows and shaded by long lashes, were like two white ovals between two black lines. His nose had the graceful curve of an eagle's beak. The dark red of his lips was heightened by the involutions of the inevitable black moustache. His full, highly-colored cheeks were remarkable for brown and yellow tones, which denoted unusual physical vigor. His whole person, one of those upon which personal courage has set its stamp, was of the type that the artist seeks to-day when he dreams of representing one of the heroes of imperial France.

The horse, drenched with sweat and shaking his head in token of his extreme impatience, his two forefeet wide apart and planted upon exactly the same line, waved his long, thick tail; and his devotion presented a material image of his master's devotion to the Emperor.

Observing how engrossed her lover was in reading Napoleon's glances, Julie had a momentary thrill of jealousy at the thought that he had not yet looked at her. Suddenly a word falls from the sovereign's lips, Victor presses his horse's flank and gallops away; but the shadow of a post on the gravel startles the beast, who shies and rears, and so sharply that his rider seems in danger. Julie shrieks and turns pale; every one looks curiously at her, but she sees no one: her eyes are fastened upon the too spirited steed, whom the officer punishes severely while he hurries off to deliver Napoleon's orders.

These bewildering scenes so absorbed Julie's faculties that she had unconsciously clutched her father's arm, involuntarily revealing her thoughts by the more or less tense pressure of her fingers. When Victor seemed on the point of being thrown by his horse, she clung still more convulsively to her father, as if she herself had been in danger of falling. The old man gazed with sombre and painful anxiety at his daughter's blooming face, and feelings of pity, of jealousy, even regrets, crept into all his deep wrinkles. But when the unaccustomed brilliancy of Julie's eyes, the cry she uttered, and the convulsive grasp of her fingers completed the revelation of a secret passion, surely he must then have had some sad presentiments of the future, for his face assumed a sinister expression.

At that moment Julie's very soul seemed to have passed into the officer's. A thought more painful than any that had previously alarmed the old man distorted the lines of his grief-stricken face when he saw d'Aiglemont, as he rode past, exchange a glance of intelligence with Julie, whose eyes were moist, and whose cheeks had taken on an extraordinary flush.

He abruptly led the girl into the Tuileries garden.

"But, father," she said, "there are still some regiments in the Place du Carrousel that are going to parade."

"No, my child; all the troops are marching off."

"I think you are mistaken, father; Monsieur d'Aiglemont was to order them to come up."

"But I am not well, my child, and I don't want to stay."

Julie had no difficulty in believing him when she glanced at his face, to which his paternal anxiety imparted a look of suffering.

"Are you in much pain?" she asked indifferently, so intent was she upon other thoughts.

"Is not every day a day of grace for me?" rejoined the old man.

"So you must needs grieve me by talking about your death! I was so happy! Will you kindly get rid of your wicked black thoughts?"

"Ah! you spoiled child!" cried the father, with a sigh. "The kindest hearts are often very cruel. To devote our whole life to you, to think only of you, to lay plans for your well-being, to sacrifice our taste to your whims, to adore you, to give you our very blood — is all that of no account? Alas! you accept everything heedlessly. To obtain always your smiles and your contemptuous love one must have the power of God. And then at last another comes! a lover, a husband, steals your heart away from us."

Julie stared in utter amazement at her father, who walked slowly along, looking at her with lifeless eyes.

"You conceal even your thoughts from us," he continued; "but from yourself too, it may be."

"What on earth are you talking about, father?"

"I think that you have secrets from me, Julie. You are in love," added the old man, quickly, seeing that the girl was blushing. "Ah! I hoped that you would be faithful to your old father till he died; I hoped to keep you with me, happy and brilliant, to go on delighting in you as you used to be. Knowing nothing of your fate, I could have believed in a peaceful future for you. But now it is impossible for me to retain a hope of happiness for you, for you love the colonel even more than you love the cousin; I can no longer doubt it."

"Why should I be forbidden to love?" she cried, with an expression of profound curiosity.

"Oh! you would not understand me, my Julie," the father replied, with a sigh.

"Tell me all the same," she rejoined, with an impatient gesture.

"Well, my child, listen to me. Young girls often create for themselves noble and alluring images, figures altogether imaginary, and form chimerical ideas concerning men and sentiments and the world. Then they ingenuously ascribe to an individual the perfections they have dreamed of, and put their trust in him; in the man of their choice they love this imaginary creation; but later, when it is too late to avoid unhappiness, the deceitful apparition which they have thus embellished, their first idol, changes to a detestable skeleton. Julie, I should prefer to see you in love with an old man rather than with the colonel. If you could look forward ten years, you would do justice to my experience. I know Victor: his gayety is gayety without wit, of the barrack sort; he has no talent and is extravagant. He is one of the men whom Heaven created to eat and digest four meals a day, sleep, love the first comer, and fight. He has no true comprehension of life. His good heart — for he has a good heart — will perhaps impel him to give his purse to an unfortunate, or to a comrade-in-arms; but he is reckless, he has none of that refinement of feeling which makes us the slaves of a woman's happiness; but he is ignorant, selfish — There are many 'buts.'"

"Nevertheless, father, he must have intelligence and talent to have been made a colonel."

"My dear child, Victor will remain a colonel all his life. I have never yet seen any one who seemed to me to be worthy of you," the old man added, with a touch of enthusiasm.

He paused a moment, looked hard at Julie, and continued: —

"But, my poor dear, you are too young as yet, too weak, too delicate, to endure the sorrows and troubles of marriage. D'Aiglemont has been spoiled by his parents, just as you have been by your mother and me. How is it possible to hope that you will be able to understand each other, with divergent wills and both so tyrannous as to be irreconcilable? You will be either a victim or a tyrant. Either alternative brings the same burden of unhappiness into a woman's life. But you are gentle and shy, so you will yield at first. And you have," he continued in a trembling voice, "a delicacy of feeling which will be misunderstood, and then —"

He did not finish his sentence, for tears choked his utterance.

"Victor," he went on after a pause, "will offend the artless qualities of your young heart. I know soldiers, my Julie; I have lived in the army. It rarely happens that the hearts of those men triumph over the habits due either to the miseries amid which they live or to the hazards of their adventurous lives."

"So you propose, father," retorted Julie in a tone half-way between seriousness and jesting, "to set my feelings at naught, to marry me to suit yourself, and not to suit me."

"Marry you to suit me!" cried the father, with a gesture of surprise; "me, whose tenderly reproachful voice you will soon cease to hear! I find that children always attribute the sacrifices their parents make for them to some selfish feeling! Marry Victor, my Julie. Some day you will bitterly regret his insignificance, his lack of order, his selfishness, his indelicacy, his ineptitude in love, and a thousand other chagrins which will come to you through him. Remember then that, under these trees, your old



father's prophetic voice rang in your ears to no purpose!"

The old man ceased to speak; he had seen his daughter shake her head in an impatient way. They took a few steps toward the gate where their carriage had stopped. During that silent walk the girl furtively scrutinized her father's face and little by little laid aside her sulky expression. The profound sorrow graven upon that downcast forehead made a keen impression upon her.

"I promise, father," she said, in a soft and trembling voice, "not to mention Victor to you until you have forgotten your prejudices against him."

The old man gazed at her in amazement. Tears glistened in his eyes and rolled down his wrinkled cheeks. He could not embrace Julie before the crowd that surrounded them, but he pressed her hand affectionately. When he entered the carriage, all the disturbing thoughts that had gathered on his brow had completely vanished. The somewhat depressed attitude of his daughter worried him much less than the innocent joy whose secret had escaped her during the review.

In the early days of March, 1814, a little less than a year after the Emperor's review, a calèche was travelling along the road from Amboise to Tours. On leaving the green domes of the walnut trees, beneath which the posting-station of La Frillière lay hidden, the carriage moved so swiftly that in a moment it reached the bridge built over the Cise at the point where that stream empties into the Loire; and there it stopped. A trace had broken as a result of the sudden burst of speed which, at his master's command, a young postilion had demanded of four stout post-horses. Thus, by a mere chance, the two occupants

of the calèche had an opportunity to witness, on awakening, one of the loveliest views to be seen along the enchanting banks of the Loire.

On his right the traveller embraces in a single glance all the windings of the Cise, which writhes like a silvery serpent through the fields, to which the first spring growths gave the hue of the emerald. On the left the Loire appears in all its magnificence. The innumerable facets of the wavelets produced by a cool morning breeze reflected the sparkling beams of the sun on the vast sheets of water displayed by that majestic stream. Here and there verdant islets dot the stream, like the pendants of a necklace. On the other side of the river the loveliest panoramas of Touraine unroll their treasures as far as the eye can see. In the distance the sight is limited only by the hills of the Cher, whose summits at this moment formed luminous lines against the transparent azure of the sky. Through the light green foliage of the islet, Tours, in the background of the picture, seems, like Venice, to rise from the bosom of the waves. The campaniles of her ancient cathedral soar gracefully into the air, where they were at that moment blended with the fantastic creations of a few whitish clouds.

Beyond the bridge on which the carriage had come to a standstill, the traveller sees before him, all along the Loire as far as Tours, a chain of cliffs which, by a freak of nature, seem to have been placed there to confine the stream, whose waves ceaselessly undermine the rock — a spectacle which never fails to arouse the traveller's amazement.

The village of Vouvray is perched, as it were, among the gorges and depressions of these cliffs, which begin to describe an elbow just above the bridge over the Cise. From Vouvray to Tours the dangerous declivities of this

torn and jagged eminence are inhabited by a community of vine-dressers. In more places than one there are three stories of houses, hollowed out of the rock, and connected by dangerous staircases cut in the rock itself. Here a girl in a short red skirt runs up to her garden on the roof. Yonder the smoke from a chimney rises among the shoots and twigs of a vineyard. Husbandmen are ploughing perpendicular fields. An old woman, seated placidly on a fragment of rock, turns her spinning-wheel beneath the blossoms of an almond tree and watches the travellers passing at her feet, smiling at their dismay. She pays no more heed to the cracks in the ground than to the overhanging ruin of an ancient wall whose foundation stones are held in place only by the twisted roots of a cloak of ivy. The cooper's hammer wakes the echoes of aerial caverns. In short, the land is cultivated everywhere, and everywhere fertile, where nature has denied land to human industry. So it is that nothing along the whole course of the Loire can be compared to the varied panorama which Touraine offers to the traveller's gaze at this season. The threefold tableau, whose varied aspects we have barely indicated, offers the mind one of those spectacles which remain inscribed forever in its memory; and when a poet has feasted upon it, his musings recur often to the project of reproducing its romantic details in the guise of fable.

When the carriage reached the bridge over the Cise, several white sails were flitting among the islets of the Loire and gave an additional charm to that charming prospect. The odor of the willows that border the stream added a penetrating fragrance to the tang of the moist breeze. The birds sang and twittered; the monotonous song of a goatherd added a touch of melancholy to the bird-concert; while the shouts of sailors told of active

movement in the distance. Wreaths of vapor, pausing capriciously about the trees scattered through that broad landscape, enhanced its beauty. It was Touraine in all her glory, spring in all its splendor. This portion of France, the only portion that foreign arms are never likely to disturb, was at this moment the only tranquil corner of the country, and one would have said that it defied the invader.

A head encased in a fatigue cap showed itself outside of the calèche as soon as it ceased to move; in a moment an impatient soldier himself opened the door and leaped down to the road, as if to quarrel with the postilion. The skill with which that young Tourainer was mending the broken trace reassured Colonel Comte d'Aiglemont, who returned to the door of the carriage, stretching his arms as if to revive his sleeping muscles; he yawned, glanced at the landscape, and placed his hand on the arm of a young woman carefully enveloped in a *vitchoura*.

"Come, Julie," he said in a hoarse voice, "wake up and look at the country: it's superb!"

Julie put her head out of the calèche. She wore a cap of marten-skin, and the fur cloak in which she was wrapped concealed her figure so completely that only her face was visible. Julie d'Aiglemont had already ceased to resemble the girl who once hurried so joyously and happily to the review at the Tuileries. Her face, still delicate in outline, had lost the rose coloring which formerly gave it such brilliancy. The black locks of hair, straightened by the dampness of the night air, intensified the whiteness of her face, whose vivacity seemed to have become deadened. Nevertheless, her eyes gleamed with supernatural fire; but beneath their lids were dark violet rings on the worn cheeks.

She glanced with indifferent eyes at the fields of the

Cher, at the Loire and its islets, and Tours, and the high cliffs of Vouvray; then, not taking the trouble to look at the delicious valley of the Cise, she threw herself back into the calèche, and said in a voice which, in the open air, sounded extremely feeble, "Yes, it 's lovely."

She had, as will be seen, for her undoing, triumphed over her father.

"Would n't you like to live here, Julie?"

"Oh! here or anywhere," she replied, carelessly.

"Are n't you well?" inquired Colonel d'Aiglemont.

"Perfectly!" replied the young woman, with momentary animation. She looked at her husband with a smile, and added, "I want to sleep."

Suddenly they heard the gallop of a horse. Victor d'Aiglemont dropped his wife's hand and looked toward the elbow which the road makes at that point. The instant that Julie ceased to be under the colonel's eye, the cheerful expression that she had forced to her pale face vanished as if a light had ceased to shine. Feeling neither a desire to look again at the landscape nor the slightest curiosity to learn who the horseman was whose horse was galloping so madly, she resumed her place in the corner of the calèche, and fastened her eyes on the horses' backs, with no indication of any feeling whatsoever. Her expression was as stupid as that of a Breton peasant listening to a sermon from his curé.

A young man, riding a blooded horse, appeared suddenly from a clump of poplars and flowering hawthorns.

"It 's an Englishman," said the colonel.

"Mon Dieu, yes, general," rejoined the postilion.

"He 's one of the fellows that, they say, mean to eat up France."

The stranger was one of those travellers who happened

to be on the Continent when Napoleon arrested all the English, by way of reprisal for the assault upon the law of nations committed by the cabinet of St. James at the time of the rupture of the Peace of Amiens. Subject to the caprice of the imperial authority, these prisoners did not all remain in the residences where they were seized or in those which they were at first allowed to select at will. Most of those who were living in Touraine at this time were transferred thither from various parts of the Empire, where their sojourn had seemed likely to compromise the success of the Emperor's continental policy.

The young captive who, at the moment of which we write was airing his morning ennui, was a victim of the bureaucracy. Two years earlier an order of the Department of Foreign Relations had removed him from the climate of Montpellier, where the rupture of the treaty had originally surprised him trying to get rid of an affection of the lungs.

The moment that the young man recognized the Comte d'Aiglemont as a soldier, he strove to avoid his scrutiny by turning his head abruptly toward the fields that border the Cise.

"All these Englishmen are as insolent as if they owned the earth!" muttered the colonel. "Luckily, Soult's going to give them a drubbing."

When the prisoner passed the calèche, he cast his eyes within. Despite the brevity of his glance, it was long enough for him to see and admire the melancholy expression which gave to the countess's pensive face an indefinable charm. There are many men whose hearts are profoundly moved by the mere appearance of suffering in a woman: to such men grief seems to be a promise of constancy or of love.

Completely absorbed in the contemplation of a cushion of her carriage, Julie paid no attention to horse or rider. The trace had been stoutly and quickly mended. The count reëntered the calèche. The postilion was anxious to regain the time lost and drove the two travellers swiftly over that portion of the embankment bordered by the overhanging cliffs in whose bosom the wines of Vouvray mature, where so many pretty houses soar upward, and whence one can see in the distance the ruins of the famous abbey of Marmoutiers, the retreat of St. Martin.

“What on earth does that transparent young milord want of us?” cried the colonel, looking back to make sure that the horseman who had followed his carriage from the bridge over the Cise was the young Englishman.

As the stranger violated none of the laws of courtesy by riding along the embankment, the colonel fell back into his corner of the calèche, after bestowing a threatening glance on the Englishman. But, despite his instinctive hostility, he could not help remarking the beauty of the steed and the grace of the rider. The young man had one of those typically Britannie faces whose texture is so fine, whose skin so soft and white, that one is sometimes tempted to think that they belong to the body of a young woman. He was tall and slender and fair-haired. His costume had the stamp of distinction and neatness which is characteristic of the men of fashion of prudish England. One would have said that he flushed from modesty rather than from pleasure at the sight of the countess.

Only once did Julie raise her eyes to the stranger's face; but she was, in a certain sense, driven to it by her husband, who insisted upon her admiring the legs of the thoroughbred horse. Thereupon Julie's eyes met those of the bashful Briton. From that moment, instead of keeping his

horse near the calèche, the gentleman followed at a distance of several paces. The countess barely glanced at him. She detected none of the human and equine perfections which were pointed out to her, but threw herself back in the carriage, after indulging in a slight movement of the eyebrows as if to assent to what her husband had said.

The colonel fell asleep once more, and the husband and wife arrived at Tours without exchanging a word; nor had the fascinating landscapes of the ever-changing scene through which they travelled once attracted Julie's notice. While her husband slumbered, Madame d'Aiglemont looked at him several times. Just as she cast her last glance at him, a sudden jolt caused a locket that she wore about her neck on a mourning chain to fall into her lap, and her father's portrait confronted her. At that apparition the tears, thus far restrained, gathered in her eyes. It may be that the Englishman saw the moist, glistening track which they left for a moment on the countess's pale cheeks, but which the air quickly dried.

Entrusted by the Emperor with orders for Maréchal Soult, who had it in charge to defend France from the English invasion of Béarn, Colonel d'Aiglemont had taken advantage of his mission to remove his wife from the dangers then threatening Paris, and was taking her to an old kinswoman of his at Tours. The carriage was soon rumbling over the pavements of Tours, across the bridge, and into the Grande Rue, where it stopped in front of the ancient mansion in which dwelt the *ci-devant* Marquise de Listomère-Landon.

The Marquise de Listomère-Landon was one of those beautiful old women, with colorless cheeks and white hair, who have a sly smile, who seem to wear *paniers*, and whose heads are swathed in caps of an unknown mode.



Septuagenarian portraits of the age of Louis XV, these women almost always have a caressing manner, as if they were still in love; less pious than devout, and less devout than they seem; always redolent of powder *à la maréchale*; excellent story-tellers, better talkers, and more prone to laugh at a recollection than at a jest. The present time is anathema to them.

When an old lady's maid came to inform the marchioness (for she was soon to resume her title) of the visit of a nephew whom she had not seen since the beginning of the Spanish war, she hastily removed her spectacles, closed the "*Galerie de l'ancienne Cour*," her favorite book, then mustered a remnant of agility in order to reach the steps as the young husband and wife were ascending them.

The aunt and the niece exchanged a swift glance.

"Good-morning, my dear aunt," cried the colonel, seizing the old woman and embracing her with undue haste. "I have brought you a young person to keep. I have come to entrust my treasure to your care. My Julie is neither a coquette nor jealous; she's as sweet as an angel — But she won't be spoiled here, I trust," he added, interrupting himself.

"Bad boy!" rejoined the marchioness, with a bantering glance at him.

She first offered, with a certain charming affability, to embrace Julie, who maintained her pensive attitude and seemed more embarrassed than curious.

"So we are going to become acquainted with each other, my dear heart," said the marchioness. "Don't be too afraid of me; I try never to be old with young people."

Before they reached the salon the marchioness had already, according to the provincial custom, ordered breakfast for her two guests; but the count arrested her elo-

quence by informing her in all seriousness that he could not possibly give her more time than was required to change horses. So the three went at once to the salon, where the colonel had barely time to narrate to his great-aunt the political and military occurrences which compelled him to ask a refuge for his young wife.

During this recital the aunt looked alternately at her nephew, who talked without interruption, and at her niece, whose pallor and depression she assumed to be caused by their enforced separation. She had the air of saying to herself, "Aha! these young people are really in love!"

Suddenly the crack of a whip arose in the silent old courtyard, where the paving-stones were outlined by clumps of grass. Victor embraced the marchioness once more and rushed from the house.

"Adieu, my love," he said, kissing his wife, who had followed him to the carriage.

"O Victor, let me go still farther with you," she said in a caressing tone; "I don't want to leave you."

"Can you think of such a thing?"

"Well, then, adieu, if you will have it so," retorted Julie.

The carriage disappeared.

"So you love my poor Victor very dearly, eh?" the marchioness inquired, accompanying the question with one of those meaning glances which old ladies are wont to bestow upon younger ones.

"Alas!" said Julie, "must not one love a man dearly, madame, to marry him?"

This sentence was emphasized by an accent of sincerity betraying either a pure heart or a profound mystery. Now, it was very hard for a woman who had been a friend of Duclos and the Maréchal de Richelieu not to try to discover the secret of the youthful couple. The aunt and

niece were at this moment on the threshold of the portecochère, looking after the receding calèche. The countess's eyes did not express love as the marchioness understood the word. The good lady was a Provençale, and her passions had been ardent.

"So you have let yourself be taken in by my good-for-nothing nephew, have you?" she asked.

The countess trembled involuntarily, for the old coquette's tone and expression seemed to indicate a knowledge of Victor's character more profound perhaps than her own. Ill at ease, she enveloped herself in that awkward dissimulation which is the first refuge of ingenuous and suffering hearts. Madame de Listomère was fain to be content with Julie's replies, but she thought gleefully that her solitude was to be enlivened by a love secret, for it seemed to her that her niece must have some amusing intrigue on the carpet.

When Madame d'Aiglemont found herself in a large salon hung with tapestries framed by gilt rods, and was seated in front of a huge fire, sheltered from the window-draughts by a Chinese screen, her melancholy was hardly likely to disappear. It was difficult at best for gayety to come to the surface under such ancient hangings, amid furniture centuries old. Nevertheless the young Parisian experienced a sort of pleasure in entering that profound solitude, and in the solemn silence of the province.

After exchanging a few words with her aunt, to whom she had lately written the letter of a newly-made bride, she sat as mute as if she were listening to an opera. Not until after two hours of a silence worthy of La Trappe did she become conscious of her discourtesy and remember that she had made only the briefest replies to her aunt's questions. The old lady had respected the other's whim by

virtue of that charming instinct which characterizes the men and women of the olden time. At the present moment the dowager was knitting. She had, indeed, left the room several times to look to the preparation of a certain "green" chamber where the countess was to sleep, and where the servants were bestowing her luggage; but she had resumed her seat in a capacious arm-chair and glanced at the young woman by stealth.

Ashamed of having yielded to her irresistible tendency to meditation, Julie tried to obtain pardon by ridiculing herself.

"My dear girl, we know how widows suffer," replied the aunt.

One must be forty years of age to realize the ironical curl of the old lady's lips.

The next day the countess was much more agreeable; she talked. Madame de Listomère no longer despaired of taming the newly-made bride, whom she had at first judged to be a shy and stupid creature. She talked to her about the pleasures of the province, of the balls and houses to which they could go. During that day the marchioness's every question was a trap which, in accordance with an ancient custom of the court, she could not forbear to set for her niece in order to form an opinion concerning her character.

For several days Julie resisted all the old lady's insistent suggestions that she should seek diversion away from home. So that, despite her desire to exhibit her pretty niece with pride, she at last abandoned the attempt to entice her into society. The countess had found an excuse for her desire for solitude and her sadness in the chagrin caused by the death of her father, for whom she was still in mourning. At the end of a week the dowager had learned

to admire Julie's angelic gentleness, her modest charm of manner, and her kindly wit, and thenceforth she was intensely interested in the mysterious melancholy which was consuming that youthful heart. The countess was one of those women who are born to be loved and who seem to carry happiness with them. Her company became so sweet and so precious to Madame de Listomère that she fairly doted on Julie, and hoped never to part from her. A month sufficed to establish an undying affection between them.

The old lady observed, not without surprise, the changes that took place in Madame d'Aiglemont's face. The vivid coloring that seemed to set her cheeks on fire gradually faded, and her complexion took on dead-white, pallid tones. As she lost her early brilliancy, she became less depressed. Sometimes the dowager aroused in her young kinswoman bursts of merriment, or wild laughter, speedily checked by an unwelcome thought. She felt sure that neither the memory of her father nor Victor's absence was the cause of the profound depression which cast a veil over the countess's life. Then she conceived so many cruel suspicions that it was difficult for her to divine the real cause of the trouble — for it may be said that we fall in with the true only by chance.

At last, one day, Julie exhibited before her astounded aunt's eyes a complete forgetfulness of marriage, the mad humor of a giddy girl, a childish gayety worthy of a mere infant, and all that delicate wit, sometimes so profound, which distinguishes young women in France. Thereupon Madame de Listomère resolved to probe the mysteries of that heart whose extreme ingenuousness was equivalent to impenetrable dissimulation.

The darkness was coming on; the two ladies were sitting

at a window that looked on the street. Julie had assumed a pensive expression as a man on horseback rode by.

"There goes one of your victims," said the old lady.

Julie looked at her with an air of amazement blended with uneasiness.

"He 's a young Englishman, of gentle birth, the Honorable Arthur Ormond, Lord Grenville's oldest son. His story is an interesting one. He came to Montpellier in 1802, hoping that the air of that neighborhood, to which the doctors had sent him, would cure him of an affection of the lungs which was likely to carry him off. Like all his compatriots, he was arrested by Bonaparte during the war, for the monster can't get along without fighting. By way of distraction the young Englishman had begun to study his disease, which was thought to be mortal. Insensibly he acquired a taste for anatomy, for medicine; he became passionately interested in matters of that sort,—an extraordinary thing in a man of quality; but the Regent was interested in chemistry! To be brief, Monsieur Arthur made surprising progress, even in the eyes of the professors at Montpellier; study consoled him for his captivity, and at the same time he effected a radical cure of his own case. They say that he went two years without speaking, breathing very seldom; that he spent his time lying in bed in a cow-stable, drinking milk from a cow sent from Switzerland, and eating water-cress. Since he has been at Tours he has n't seen anybody; he 's as proud as a peacock; but you have certainly made a conquest of him, for it probably is n't on my account that he 's ridden under our windows twice a day ever since you 've been here. He is certainly in love with you."

The last words aroused the countess as if by magic. She allowed a movement to escape her, and a smile, that

surprised the marchioness. Far from manifesting the satisfaction instinctively felt even by the most rigid of women when she makes a man unhappy, Julie's look was dull and cold. Her face denoted a feeling of repulsion not far removed from horror. It was not the sentence of proscription that a loving woman pronounces against the whole world in favor of a single being; then she can laugh and jest. No, Julie was at that moment like a person who remembers so vividly a danger recently escaped that she still feels the anguish of it.

The aunt, fully convinced that Julie did not love her nephew, was stupefied at the discovery that she loved no one. She trembled at having to acknowledge in Julie a heart that was disenchanted; a young wife who had needed only the experience of a day, of a night perhaps, fully to appreciate Victor's absolute nullity.

"If she knows him, it's all over," she thought; "my nephew will soon undergo all the disadvantages of marriage."

It occurred to her then to convert Julie to the monarchical doctrines of the age of Louis XV; but a few hours later she learned, or rather she divined, the state of affairs — not at all uncommon in society — to which the countess owed her depression of spirit. Having suddenly fallen into profound reflection, Julie retired to her room earlier than usual. When her maid had undressed her and had left her ready for bed, she sat before the fire, buried in a "duchesse" upholstered in yellow velvet, an ancient affair as comfortable to the afflicted as to the care-free. She wept, she sighed, she meditated; then she drew a little table to her side, found some paper, and began to write. The hours passed swiftly; the secrets that she confided to that letter seemed to cost her dear, for each

sentence led to a long reverie. Suddenly she burst into tears and dropped her pen. At that moment the clock struck two. Her head, as heavy as a dying woman's, fell forward on her breast, and when she raised it she saw her aunt, who suddenly appeared before her as if she had stepped from the tapestries on the wall.

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired the marchioness. "Why do you sit up so late, and above all why are you weeping here all by yourself, — a young creature like you?"

She sat down beside Julie without further ceremony and devoured with her eyes the unfinished letter.

"Were you writing to your husband?"

"Have I any idea where he is?" Julie replied.

The aunt took the letter and read it. She had brought her spectacles, — there was premeditation in her action. The innocent creature allowed the letter to be taken, without the faintest remonstrance. It was neither lack of dignity nor any consciousness of concealed guilt that thus deprived her of all energy; no, her aunt had come upon her at one of those critical moments when the mind is inert, when one is indifferent to everything, good as well as evil, silence as well as confidence; like a virtuous maiden who pours scorn upon a lover but who at night finds herself so melancholy, so deserted, that she longs for him, she craves a heart upon which to lay her suffering.

Without a word Julie allowed the seal which delicacy affixes to an unsealed letter to be broken, and sat lost in thought while her aunt read as follows: —

"MY DEAR LOUISA, — Why insist so many times upon the performance of the most reckless promise that two ignorant girls can exchange? You often wonder, you write, why I haven't answered your questions in six



months. If you have n't understood my silence, perhaps you will guess the reason for it to-day, when you learn the secrets I am going to confide to you. I should have buried them forever in the depths of my heart if you had not told me of your approaching marriage. You are going to be married, Louisa! The mere thought makes me shudder. Marry, my poor child; and then, a few months hence, one of your bitterest regrets will arise from your memory of what we once were when, one evening at Écouen, sitting together under the tallest oaks on the mountain, we gazed at the lovely valley at our feet and admired the gorgeous beams of the setting sun, whose reflection enveloped us. We sat on a stone and fell into a sort of ecstasy, succeeded by the sweetest melancholy. You were the first to suggest that that distant sun spoke to us of the future. We were very curious and very reckless then! Do you remember all the wild things we did? We embraced like lovers, as we said. We swore that the one first married would reveal to the other the secrets of wedlock, those joys which our childish hearts imagined to be so enchanting. That evening will be your undoing, Louisa. In those days you were young and lovely and heedless, if not happy; a husband will make you in a few days what I am already, ugly and old and ailing. To tell you how proud and vain and happy I was to marry Colonel Victor d'Aiglemont would be absurd. And, indeed, how could I tell you? I have forgotten, myself. In a few moments my childhood became like a dream. My demeanor during the solemn day that sanctified a bond the full meaning of which was hidden from me was not free from reproach. More than once my father tried to check my gayety, for I made no concealment of a mad joy which people thought unbecoming, and what I said revealed evil thoughts, just because it meant nothing of the sort. I played a thousand childish tricks with my bridal veil and my gown and my flowers. When I was left alone at night, in the bedroom to which I had been escorted with due ceremony, I tried to think of some mischievous thing to mystify Victor; and, awaiting his coming, I had palpitations of the heart like

those I used to have long ago on the mysterious thirty-first of December, when I crept, undiscovered, into the salon where the New Year's presents were piled up. When my husband entered and began to hunt for me, my stifled laughter behind the muslin curtains in which I had wrapped myself was the last outburst of that pleasant gayety that enlivened our childish games. . . ."

When the dowager had finished reading the letter which, judging from this exordium, must have been destined to contain some heart-breaking observations, she slowly laid her spectacles on the table, placed the letter beside them, and fixed upon her niece two green eyes, whose clear flame was not yet dimmed by age.

"My child," she said, "a married woman cannot write such a letter as this to an unmarried one without offending the proprieties —"

"That is what I thought," Julie interposed; "and I was ashamed of myself while you were reading it."

"If we don't like a dish that's served at the table, we mustn't turn other people against it, my dear," continued the old lady; "especially when, from Eve's day to our own, marriage has been considered such an excellent thing. — You have no mother?"

The countess started, then raised her head slowly and said: —

"I have longed for my mother many, many times in the last year; but I made the mistake of not listening to my father's repugnance to have Victor for a son-in-law."

She glanced at her aunt, and a quiver of joy dried her tears when she saw the kindly expression upon that aged face. She held out her fair young hand to the marchioness, who seemed to ask for it; and when their fingers met, the two women fully understood each other.

"Poor orphan!" exclaimed the aunt.

That word was a final ray of light for Julie. She fancied that she could still hear her father's prophetic voice.

"Your hands are burning! Are they always like this?" inquired the old lady.

"I have n't been without fever for seven or eight days," she replied.

"You had fever and you concealed it from me!"

"I have had it a year," said Julie, with a sort of maidenly anxiety.

"And so, my dear little angel, marriage thus far has been to you simply one long sorrow?"

The young woman dared not reply, but she made an affirmative gesture that betrayed all her suffering.

"Are you very unhappy?"

"Oh, no, aunt! Victor loves me to idolatry, and I adore him, he is so good!"

"Yes, you love him; but you avoid him, don't you?"

"Yes — sometimes. He looks for me too often."

"Are n't you often worried when you are alone by the fear that he 'll take you by surprise?"

"Alas! yes, aunt. But I love him dearly, I assure you."

"Don't you secretly blame yourself for not being able to share his pleasure? Does n't it occur to you sometimes that lawful love is harder to bear than a criminal passion would be?"

"Ah! that is true," she said, weeping. "So you divine everything, while everything is an enigma to me! My senses are deadened, I have no ideas; in short, I find life very hard. My heart is weighed down by an indefinable dread that chills my sentiments and casts me into a constant torpor. I have no voice to complain, no words to

express my suffering. I suffer, and I am ashamed to suffer when I see how happy Victor is in what is killing me."

"Mere childish nonsense, all this!" cried the marchioness, her withered face suddenly lighted up by a merry smile — a reflection of the joys of her youth.

"And you, too, you laugh!" exclaimed the young woman in despair.

"I was once like that," rejoined the marchioness promptly. "Now that Victor has left you alone, have n't you become a girl again, at peace with yourself; with no pleasures, but with no suffering?"

Julie stared at her, aghast with surprise.

"In short, my angel, you adore Victor, don't you? But you would rather be his sister than his wife — in fact, marriage is n't a success with you?"

"Well, no, aunt. But why smile?"

"You are right, my poor child. There 's nothing very amusing in it all. Your future would be big with misfortune of more sorts than one if I did n't take you under my protection, and if the experience of my long life did n't help me to guess the very harmless cause of your distress. My nephew did n't deserve his good fortune, the fool! In the reign of our beloved Louis XV, a young woman in your position would very soon have punished her husband for treating her in genuine moss-trooper style. The selfish fellow! The soldiers of this imperial tyrant are all ignorant knaves! They take brutality for gallantry, they know women no better than they know how to love them; they think that the going to face death to-morrow relieves them from the necessity of treating us with any attention or consideration to-day. In the old days men knew how to love as well as how to die in due season. I will train him for you, my dear niece. I will put an end to the distressing

misunderstanding, not unnatural by the way, which would bring you to hate each other, to long for divorce, assuming that you did n't die of despair before you came to that."

Julie listened with a sort of stupefaction, surprised to hear from her aunt's lips words whose wisdom she felt rather than understood, and terrified to find on the lips of a woman of long experience the same judgment, albeit more mildly phrased, that her father had expressed concerning Victor. It may be that she had a swift intuition of her future, and she evidently realized the weight of the misfortunes that were destined to overwhelm her, for she burst into tears, and threw herself into the old lady's arms, saying, "Be my mother!"

The aunt did not weep, for the Revolution left few tears in the eyes of the women of the old monarchy. In the old days love, and later the Terror, familiarized them with the most painful changes of fortune, so that amid the perils of life they preserve a frigid dignity, a sincere but unexpansive affection, which enables them to be always true to etiquette and to a nobility of bearing which the new morality has made a great mistake in repudiating. She took the younger woman in her arms, kissed her forehead with an affection and a grace which are often attributable to the manners and habits of such women rather than to their hearts. She coaxed her with soft words, promised her a happy future, soothed her with promises of love as she helped her to undress, as if she were her daughter, a dearly loved daughter whose hopes and sorrows became at once her own. In her niece she saw herself once more in her youth, pretty and inexperienced. And the countess went to sleep, happy in having found a friend, a mother, to whom henceforth she could tell everything.

The next morning, as the aunt and niece embraced with

a heartiness and an air of understanding which shows progress in sentiment and a more perfect union between two hearts, they heard a horse's step, turned their heads at the same instant, and saw the young Englishman riding slowly by, as his custom was. He seemed to have made a study of the manner of life led by the two lone women and never failed to appear at their breakfast and dinner hours. His horse slackened his pace without needing to be told; and during the time that he took in passing the two windows of the dining-rooms Arthur would cast in their direction a melancholy glance, which was generally treated with silent contempt by the countess.

But, being addicted to the low-minded curiosity which pries into the most trivial things in order to enliven life in the provinces, and which even superior minds find it hard to avoid, the marchioness was much amused by the shy and solemn passion so silently expressed by the young Englishman. Those periodical glances had become a sort of habit with her, and each day she announced Arthur's appearance with some new jest.

As they seated themselves at the table the two looked simultaneously at the islander. Julie's eyes and Arthur's met, and this time with such plain manifestations of feeling on his part that the young woman blushed. The Englishman instantly put spurs to his horse and galloped away.

"What am I to do, madame?" queried Julie. "It must seem certain to the people who see him ride by that I am —"

"Yes," her aunt interrupted her.

"Well, might n't I tell him not to ride by here as he does?"

"But would n't that make him think that he is dangerous? Besides, can you prevent a respectable man from

going and coming as he thinks best? To-morrow we won't eat in this room. When he does n't see us here any more, the young gentleman will cease to love you through the window. That, my dear child, is what a woman would do who knows the ways of the world."

But Julie's unhappiness was destined to be complete. The two women had hardly left the table when Victor's valet-de-chambre unexpectedly arrived. He had come from Bourges at full speed, by unfrequented roads, and brought the countess a letter from her husband. Victor, who had left the Emperor, informed his wife of the fall of the Empire, the taking of Paris, and the enthusiasm for the Bourbons that was manifesting itself in every part of France. But, as he did not know whether he could get to Tours, he begged her to come in all haste to Orléans, where he hoped to meet her with passports. The valet-de-chambre, a former soldier, was to escort Julie from Tours to Orléans — a route which Victor believed to be still open.

"You have n't a moment to lose, madame," said the man; "the Prussians and Austrians and English are going to join forces either at Blois or at Orléans."

In an hour or two the young woman was ready, and set out in an old travelling carriage lent her by her aunt.

"Why don't you come to Paris with us?" she said, as she embraced the marchioness. "Now that the Bourbons are to be restored, you would find —"

"Even without their un hoped-for restoration I should have gone, my dear, for my advice is too necessary to both Victor and you. So I will make all my arrangements to join you there."

Julie started with her maid, and was attended by the old trooper, who galloped beside the chaise to look to his

mistress's safety. At nightfall, on reaching a relay station just outside of Blois, Julie, being disturbed by the rumbling of a carriage close behind, which had not ceased to follow her since they left Amboise, looked out of the window to see who her travelling companions might be. The moonlight enabled her to distinguish Arthur standing within three yards of her, with his eyes fixed upon her chaise. Their glances met. The countess hastily drew back into the carriage, but with a thrill of fear that made her heart beat fast. Like most really innocent and inexperienced young women, she looked upon a passion involuntarily aroused in a man as a sin. She felt an instinctive terror, due perhaps to consciousness of her weakness against so bold an attack. One of man's most powerful weapons is this redoubtable power of forcing a woman to think of him when her naturally sensitive imagination takes fright or offence at his pursuit.

The countess recalled her aunt's advice and resolved to remain in her post-chaise during the rest of her journey. But at every change of horses she heard the Englishman walking about the two carriages, and on the road the irritating rumble of his calèche was forever in her ears. She reflected that when she was with her husband once more he would know how to defend her against that extraordinary persecution.

"But suppose the young man is not in love with me, after all?"

This was her last reflection. On reaching Orléans her post-chaise was stopped by the Prussians, taken into the courtyard of an inn, and guarded by soldiers. Resistance was out of the question. The foreigners explained to the three travellers, by energetic gestures, that their orders were to allow no one to leave the carriage. For about two



hours the countess remained a prisoner, amid soldiers who smoked and laughed, and sometimes stared at her with impudent curiosity; but at last she saw them stand aside from the carriage, saluting with respect as several horsemen approached, and a group of foreign officers, at their head an Austrian general, surrounded the vehicle.

"Accept our apologies, madame," said the general; "there has been a mistake. You can continue your journey without fear; here is a passport which will protect you from any sort of annoyance hereafter."

The countess took the paper in a trembling hand and stammered some unintelligible words. Near the general, in the uniform of an English officer, she saw Arthur, to whom no doubt she owed her speedy deliverance. Rejoicing and downcast at once, the young Englishman turned away his head, and did not venture to look at Julie except by stealth.

Thanks to the passport Madame d'Aiglemont reached Paris without any unpleasant experience. She found her husband there, who, being released from his oath of loyalty to the Emperor, had received a most flattering welcome from the Comte d'Artois, who had been appointed Lieutenant-General of the kingdom by his brother Louis XVIII. Victor had a high command in the *gardes du corps*, which gave him the rank of general.

But amid the festivities which commemorated the return of the Bourbons, a very severe misfortune, destined to have a marked effect upon her whole life, befell poor Julie. She lost the Marquise de Listomère-Landon. The old lady died of joy and of an attack of gout that went to her heart, on seeing the Duc d'Angoulême at Tours. And so the only person whose age gave her the right to counsel Victor, the only one who could have confirmed the

accord between the husband and wife, was dead, and Julie realized the full extent of her loss. There was no one left but herself between herself and her husband. But, young and timid as she was, at first she preferred suffering to complaint. The very perfection of her character prevented her from venturing to evade her duties or from trying to fathom the cause of her suffering; for to bring it to an end would have been too delicate a matter: Julie would have feared to outrage her maidenly modesty.

A word concerning M. d'Aiglemont's fortunes during the Restoration.

Does not one meet many men whose utter nullity is a secret to most people who know them? High rank, illustrious birth, important functions, a certain superficial courtesy, great reserve in conduct, or the prestige of fortune — to such men these things are like guards which prevent criticism from reaching their real existence. They resemble kings, whose true stature, character, and morals can never be well known or fairly estimated, because they are always seen at too great a distance or too close at hand. These men of artificial qualities ask questions instead of talking, — they have the knack of putting other people on the stage in order to avoid posing before them; then, with great adroitness, they pull each one by the thread of his passions or his interests, and thus make tools of men who are really superior to them, use them as puppets, and think that they are of small account because they have pulled them down to their own level. Thereupon they obtain the natural triumph of a paltry but persistent idea over greater but more mobile ideas. So that, properly to judge such empty heads and reckon their negative value, the observer should possess a subtle rather than a lofty mind, more patience than breadth of

view, more tact and shrewdness than grandeur and elevation in his ideas.

Nevertheless, however skilful these usurpers may be in defending their weak points, it is very hard for them to deceive their wives or their mothers or their children or the friend of the family; but all of these almost always hold their peace touching a matter which, in some sense, involves the common honor; and, in fact, they often help them to impose on the world at large. If, thanks to such domestic conspiracies, many idiots are esteemed superior men, they make up for the superior men who are esteemed idiots, so that the social state has always the same net quantity of visible talents.

Consider now the rôle that a woman of intelligence and feeling must needs play in presence of a husband of this description: can you not imagine lives filled to overflowing with sorrow and devotion for which nothing on earth can compensate a heart full of love and delicacy of feeling? Let a woman of strong will find herself in this lamentable situation and she extricates herself from it by a crime, as Catherine II did, who is called none the less Catherine *the Great*. But as all women do not sit on thrones, they submit for the most part to domestic miseries which are none the less terrible for being unknown. They who seek here on earth instant consolation for their ills often simply change the form of their suffering if they choose to remain true to their duties, or commit a sin if they violate the law to the advantage of their pleasures.

All these reflections are applicable to Julie's private history. So long as Napoleon retained his power the Comte d'Aiglemont, a colonel like so many others, a good orderly officer, an excellent man to perform a dangerous

mission, but incapable of a command of any importance, aroused no envy, but was looked upon as one of the worthy officers whom the Emperor favored, and was what the military men commonly called "a good fellow."

The Restoration, which gave him the title of marquis, did not find him ungrateful: he followed the Bourbons to Ghent. This logical act of fidelity gave the lie to the horoscope his father-in-law had cast for him when he said that he would always be a colonel. On the second return of the Bourbons he, being made a lieutenant-general and having once more become a marquis, was ambitious to reach the peerage; he adopted the maxims and the politics of the "Conservateur," wrapped himself in a dissimulation that concealed nothing, became solemn, prone to ask questions and to say little, and was taken for a very deep person. Taking refuge constantly in the conventional forms of courtesy, well supplied with formulæ, apt at remembering and uttering the ready-made phrases which are regularly minted in Paris to furnish as small change to fools the simulacrum of great ideas or great deeds, men of the world deemed him a man of taste and of learning. Hidebound in his aristocratic opinions, he was cited as having a noble character. If by chance he became momentarily thoughtless and gay, as he used to be, his meaningless and idiotic remarks were supposed to hold a diplomatic hidden meaning for others.

"Oh! he does n't say what he means," was the thought of some most excellent men.

He was as well served by his good qualities as by his defects. His personal courage was responsible for an eminent military reputation, which nothing belied, because he had never commanded in chief. His manly, noble countenance seemed to express broad-minded ideas, and

was not an imposture to his wife alone. Hearing everybody give him credit for his supposititious talents, the Marquis d'Aiglemont ended by persuading himself that he was one of the most remarkable men attached to the court, where, thanks to his external aspect, he succeeded in making himself agreeable, and where his various merits were accepted without protest.

Nevertheless he was modest at home; he felt instinctively his wife's superiority, young as she was, and of his involuntary respect for her was born a secret power which the marchioness found herself forced to accept, despite all her efforts to avoid the burden. As her husband's adviser, she directed his actions and his fortune. This unnatural influence was to her a sort of humiliation and the source of many griefs that she buried in her heart. In the first place, her delicate feminine instinct told her that it is much nobler to obey a man of talent than to guide a fool, and that a young wife, compelled to think and act as a man, is neither man nor woman, renounces all the charms of her sex while losing its disadvantages, and acquires none of the privileges which our laws have awarded to the stronger. Her life concealed a very bitter source of derision. Was she not compelled to honor a hollow idol, to protect her protector, a poor creature who, as the wages of a never-failing devotion, tossed her the selfish love of a husband, saw in her only the woman, did not deign, or had not the power, — a no less cruel insult, — to concern himself about her pleasures, or as to the cause of her melancholy and her fading beauty? Like most husbands who feel the yoke of a superior mind, the marquis saved his self-esteem by arguing from Julie's physical weakness to a moral weakness, and was pleased to pity her, calling Fate to account for having given him a sickly girl for a wife.

In short, he made himself out the victim, when he was in fact the executioner.

The marchioness, weighed down by all the miseries of that wretched existence, must needs continue to smile at her imbecile of a husband, bedeck with flowers a house in mourning, and placard happiness upon a face made pale by secret tortures. This responsibility for the family honor, this magnificent self-abnegation, gradually gave to the young marchioness a womanly dignity, a consciousness of well-doing, which served as her protection against the perils of the world. And then — to probe that heart of hers to the bottom — it may be that the secret, hidden unhappiness by which her first innocent love was crowned, caused her to conceive a horror of passion; it may be that she could not imagine the enthusiasm, the illicit but intoxicating joys which lead some women to forget the laws and principles of virtue whereon society rests. Renouncing, as she might renounce a dream, the joys, the loving harmony, which Madame de Listomère-Landon's long experience had promised her, she awaited with resignation the end of her sufferings, hoping to die young.

Since her return from Touraine her health had failed day by day, and life seemed to her to be measured by suffering — by a fashionable sort of suffering, to be sure; an almost voluptuous disease which might seem, in the eyes of superficial folk, the imagination of a *petite-maîtresse*. The doctors had sentenced her to lie always on a couch, where she lost her bloom amid the flowers that surrounded her, fading away like them. Her weakness forbade exercise and the open air; she went out only in a closed carriage. Constantly surrounded by all the marvels of our modern industry and luxury, she resembled not so much an invalid as an indolent queen. Some friends, enamoured

perhaps of her ill-fortune and of her weakness, sure of always finding her at home, and speculating doubtless upon her eventual restoration to health, came to bring her the news and to inform her of the innumerable trivial happenings that give so much variety to life in Paris.

Thus her melancholy, albeit serious and deep-seated, was the melancholy of opulence. She resembled a lovely flower whose roots are eaten by a destructive insect. She went into society sometimes, not from inclination, but to comply with the requirements of the position to which her husband aspired. Her voice and the perfection of her singing made it possible for her to win applause, which almost always flatters a young woman. But of what avail were triumphs which she could attribute neither to sentiments nor to hopes? Her husband did not care for music. In fact, she was almost always embarrassed in salons, where her beauty attracted selfish homage. Her situation aroused a cruel sort of compassion, a painful interest.

She was attacked by an inflammation, not uncommonly fatal, which women confide to one another in whispers, and for which our neology has thus far been unable to find a name. Despite the silence in which her life was passing, the cause of her suffering was a secret to nobody. Always a mere girl, despite her marriage, the most careless glance made her ashamed. And so, to avoid having to blush, she always appeared smiling and cheerful; she affected a false merriment, always said that she was very well, or forestalled questions about her health by modest falsehoods. But in 1817 something happened which was most helpful in ameliorating the deplorable condition in which Julie had been existing hitherto. She had a daughter, and insisted on nursing her. For two years

the intense absorption and the anxious joys afforded by the cares of motherhood made her life less wretched.

Necessarily she lived apart from her husband. The doctors predicted better health for her in future; but she put no faith in their hypotheses. Like all those for whom life has no further attraction, she looked forward to death perhaps as a blessed conclusion.

At the beginning of the year 1819 life was harder to bear than ever. Just when she was congratulating herself upon the negative happiness she had succeeded in achieving, a horrible abyss opened at her feet: her husband had gradually accustomed himself to do without her. This cooling of an affection already lukewarm and altogether selfish might well lead to many a disaster which her tact and prudence caused her to foresee. Although she was certain of retaining a great power over Victor, and of having conquered his esteem forever, she dreaded the influence of the passions upon a man so devoid of character and so vain and thoughtless. Often her friends surprised her in profound meditation; the least perspicacious jestingly asked her the reason, as if a young woman could think of nothing but frivolous things, as if there were not almost always a profound meaning in the reflections of the mother of a family! Moreover, unhappiness as well as genuine happiness induces meditation.

Sometimes, while playing with her little H  l  ne, Julie would gaze at her with a gloomy expression and would cease to answer the childish questions that afford so much pleasure to mothers, seeking to interpret her destiny, present and future. Her eyes would suddenly fill with tears when something reminded her of the scene at the review at the Tuileries. Her father's prophetic words would ring once more in her ear, and her conscience would



reproach her for failing to realize their wisdom. From her foolish disobedience all her misfortunes had come; and she often found it hard to decide which of them all was the hardest to bear. Not only were the precious treasures of her heart still unknown, but she could never succeed in making herself understood by her husband, even in the most commonplace affairs of life. Just when the power of loving was growing stronger and more active in her heart, lawful love, conjugal love, was fading away amid serious physical and mental sufferings. She had for her husband that sort of compassion bordering on contempt which, sooner or later, enfeebles all the sentiments. Even if her conversations with some of her friends, if some examples before her eyes, or if certain adventures in high life had not shown her that love is the source of immense happiness, her own wounds would have led her to divine the profound and unsullied joys which attend the union of fraternal hearts.

In the picture that her memory often drew of the past, Arthur's guileless face appeared, every day purer and comelier, but only briefly; for she dared not dwell upon that memory. The young Englishman's silent and bashful love was the only episode that had left any pleasant traces in that depressed and solitary heart since her marriage. It may be that all the disappointed hopes, all the ungratified desires which gradually cast a shadow upon Julie's mind, reverted by a natural trick of the imagination to that young man whose manners, sentiments, and character seemed sympathetic with hers in so many respects. But that thought always wore the aspect of a caprice, a vision; and after such unrealizable dreams, always brought to an end by sighs, Julie awoke unhappier than before, and was more keenly conscious of her latent

sorrows when she had soothed them to sleep beneath the wings of an imaginary happiness.

Sometimes her lamentations assumed a tone of audacity and folly; she would enjoy life at any cost; but even more frequently she fell a prey to a deadening sort of torpor, listening without understanding, or conceived ideas so vague, so ill-defined, that she could have found no words to express them. Disappointed in her most secret desires, in the plans which she dreamed of long before, as a girl, she was obliged to devour her tears. To whom could she have complained? by whom could she hope to be heard? Moreover, she had that extreme womanly delicacy, that enchanting modesty of feeling, which consists in restraining vain lamentations, in not seizing an advantage when triumph is certain to humiliate both victor and vanquished.

Julie strove to impart her own capacity, her own qualities to M. d'Aiglemont, and boasted of enjoying the happiness that she lacked. All her woman's shrewdness was employed, to no purpose whatever, in painstaking expedients which were not remarked by the man whose despotism they perpetuated. At times she was fairly drunk with unhappiness, without an idea in her head, and without self-control; but, fortunately, genuine piety always led her back to a supreme hope: she took refuge in the future life — an admirable faith which caused her to take up anew her painful task. Those terrible combats, those rendings of the heart, were unattended by glory; those endless hours of depression were unknown; no human being saw her lifeless glances, her bitter tears shed in solitude.

The perils of the critical situation at which the marchioness had arrived by slow degrees, by force of circumstances, manifested themselves in her in all their gravity

during a certain evening in Janaury, 1820. When a husband and wife are perfectly acquainted with each other and have become accustomed to each other by long communion; when a woman can interpret a man's slightest actions and fathom the feelings or the facts he is concealing from her, then a sudden light will often follow reflections or remarks due to mere chance, or originally made without thought. A woman often wakes on the brink or in the depths of an abyss. Thus the marchioness, happy to be alone for a few days, divined the secret of her being left alone. Inconstant or tired of her, generous or compassionate to her, her husband had ceased to belong to her. At that moment she did not think of herself, or of her sufferings, or of her sacrifices; she was no longer aught but a mother, and she saw only the fortune, the future, the happiness of her daughter — her daughter, the only creature from whom she derived any happiness; her *Hélène*, the only treasure that attached her to life.

Now, Julie was determined to live, to save her child from the terrible yoke with which a stepmother might choke the dear creature to death. At this new prevision of a miserable future she fell into one of those fits of ardent meditation which consume whole years. Between herself and her husband, henceforth, there lay a whole world of thoughts whose weight would rest upon her alone. Hitherto, sure that Victor loved her as well as he was capable of loving, she had devoted herself to the furtherance of a happiness that she did not share; but to-day, having no longer the satisfaction of knowing that her tears were the source of her husband's pleasure, alone in the world, all that was left to her was a choice of evils.

In the midst of the discouragement which, in the tranquillity and silence of the night, relaxed all her forces, at

the moment when, leaving her couch and her dying fire, she had gone to her daughter's bedside and was gazing at her, dry-eyed, by the light of a lamp, M. d'Aiglemont appeared, in high spirits. Julie summoned him to admire Hélène in her sleep; but he greeted his wife's enthusiasm with the trite phrase, "At that age, all children are pretty."

Then, having carelessly kissed the child's forehead, he lowered the curtains of the cradle, looked at Julie, took her hand, and led her to a seat by his side on that same couch whence so many fatal thoughts had arisen.

"You are very lovely to-night, Madame d'Aiglemont!" he cried, with the insufferable gayety whose emptiness was so well known to the marchioness.

"Where did you pass the evening?" she asked, feigning the utmost indifference.

"At Madame de Sérizy's."

He had taken a hand-screen from the mantel, and he examined it closely, not observing the marks of the tears shed by his wife.

Julie shuddered. Words could not describe the torrent of thoughts which rushed from her heart and which she had to force back.

"Madame de Sérizy gives a concert next Monday, and is dying to have you come. The mere fact that it's a long while since you've been seen in society is enough to make her want you at her house. She's a good creature and very fond of you. You will give me pleasure by going there; I almost promised for you."

"I'll go," said Julie.

The tone of her voice, her accent, and the expression on her face, were all so penetrating, so peculiar, that, despite his indifference, Victor stared at her in amazement. It

was simply this: Julie had divined that Madame de Sérizy was the woman who had stolen her husband's heart. She fell into a reverie of dull despair, and seemed very intent on the fire. Victor twirled the screen in his fingers with the bored air of a man who, having enjoyed himself elsewhere, brings home with him the fatigue of enjoyment. After yawning several times, he took a candle in one hand, and with the other languidly sought to fondle his wife's neck, and would have kissed it; but Julie stooped, presented her forehead, and received there the good-night kiss, a mechanical kiss, without affection, a sort of grimace which seemed hateful to her.

When Victor had closed the door behind him, his wife's legs wavered; she fell upon a chair and burst into tears. One must have undergone the torture of a similar scene to realize all that it contains of agony, to conceive the endless, ghastly dramas to which it gives birth. Those simple, meaningless words, the pauses between the two, their movements, their glances, the way in which the marquis had stood before the fire, his attitude as he tried to kiss his wife's neck, all combined to make of that hour a tragic dénouement to the lonely and unhappy life led by Julie.

In her frenzy she knelt beside her couch, buried her face in it so that she could see nothing, and prayed to Heaven, giving to the familiar words of her petition a fervor of accent, a new meaning, which would have torn her husband's heart if he had heard her.

For a week she was engrossed by the thought of her future, haunted by her unhappy lot, which she studied carefully, seeking a way to avoid lying to her heart, to regain her influence over the marquis, and to live long enough to provide for her daughter's welfare. And the result was a determination to do battle with her rival, to

reappear in society, to cut a figure there, to feign an affection for her husband which she could no longer feel, to charm him back to her side; and then, when by her arts she should have subjected him anew to her power, to play the coquette with him, like those capricious mistresses who take pleasure in tormenting their lovers. This hateful scheme was the only possible remedy for her troubles. In this way she would become mistress of her own sufferings, she would arrange them according to her pleasure, and would make them less frequent by subjugating her husband, by subjecting him to a terrible despotism. She had not the slightest remorse for making life hard for him. At a single bound she plunged into the cold schemes of indifference, to save her daughter; she suddenly detected the treacheries, the falsehoods, of creatures who do not love, the deceptions of coquetry, and the abominable wiles which cause the woman to be so bitterly detested in whom men assume to detect innate corruption.

Unknown to Julie, her feminine vanity, her self-interest, and a vague thirst for revenge, combined with her mother-love to lead her into a path where new sorrows awaited her. But her character was too lovely, her intelligence too refined, above all she was too sincere, to be for long a party to such fraudulent plans. Accustomed as she was to read her own heart, at the first step in vice — for this was vice — the outcry of her conscience would not fail to drown the voice of passion and selfishness. In truth, in a young woman whose heart is still pure, and in whom love is still virtuous, even the sentiment of maternity obeys the voice of modesty. Is not modesty all of woman?

But Julie refused to see any danger, any sin in her new life. She went to Madame de Sérizy's. Her rival expected to see a pale-faced, languishing woman; the marchioness

had put on rouge, and appeared in all the splendor of a toilette which heightened her beauty.

Madame la Comtesse de Sérizy was one of those women who assume to wield a sort of imperial power, in Paris, over the fashions and over society. She dictated decrees which, being accepted in the circle in which she reigned, seemed to her to be universally adopted. She set herself up as a maker of *bons mots*; she was the most autocratic of critics. Literature, politics, men, and women — all underwent her censorship; and Madame de Sérizy seemed to defy the censorship of other people. Her house was a model of good taste in every respect.

Amid those salons filled with beautiful and fashionable women, Julie triumphed over the countess. Bright, clever, scintillating, she had about her the most distinguished men of the company. To the despair of the women her toilette was beyond criticism, and they all envied the cut of her gown and a style of corsage the effect of which was generally attributed to the genius of some unknown dress-maker; for women prefer to believe in the science of dress-making rather than in the grace and perfection of form of those who are made to carry their dresses well.

When Julie rose to go to the piano, to sing Desdemona's romanza, the men hastened from all the rooms to hear that celebrated voice, which had been hushed so long, and there was absolute silence. The marchioness was profoundly moved when she saw the heads crowded together at the doors and all eyes fastened upon her. She looked for her husband, flashed at him a glance instinct with coquetry, and saw with delight that at that moment his self-esteem was tremendously flattered.

Exulting in this triumph, she enchanted the company with the first part of *Al piu salice*. Never had Malibran

or Pasta sung with such absolute perfection of tone and feeling. But, as she was about to continue, she cast her eye over the different groups and espied Arthur, whose eyes were immovably fixed upon her. She quivered from head to foot, and her voice faltered. Madame de Sérizy left her seat and rushed toward her.

"What is it, my dear? Oh! poor child, she is so ill! I trembled when I saw her undertake a thing that I feared was beyond her strength."

The romanza was not finished. Julie, vexed beyond measure, lacked the courage to continue, and submitted to her rival's perfidious sympathy. The women whispered, and by dint of discussing the incident, they ended by divining the contest that had begun between Julie and Madame de Sérizy, whom they did not spare in their evil-speaking.

The strange presentiments which had so often disturbed Julie were suddenly realized. In her thoughts about Arthur it had gratified her to believe that a man apparently so gentle and refined would be likely to remain true to his first love. Sometimes she had flattered herself that she was the object of that ideal passion, the chaste, genuine passion of a young man all of whose thoughts belong to his beloved, all of whose moments are devoted to her, who has no subterfuges, who blushes at what makes a woman blush, thinks like a woman, gives her no rivals, and abandons himself to her without a thought of ambition or renown or fortune. She had fancied all this of Arthur, in pure folly, to pass the time; but suddenly she thought that her dream had come true. She read on the young Englishman's quasi-feminine face the profound thoughts, the gentle melancholy, the painful resignation of which she was herself a victim. She recognized herself in him. Unhappiness and sadness are the most eloquent interpreters



of love, and correspond between two suffering mortals with incredible swiftness. The intimate perception and mutual comprehension of ideas and of things are in them complete and unerring. So that the violence of the shock she felt revealed to the marchioness all the perils of the future. Only too glad to find a pretext for her confusion in her customary state of health, she allowed herself to be overwhelmed by Madame de Sérizy's crafty compassion.

The interruption of the *romanza* was an event which a number of persons discussed among themselves with diverse sentiments. Some deplored Julie's lot, and lamented that so remarkable a woman should be lost to society; others were keen to learn the cause of her ill health and of the solitude in which she lived.

"Well, my dear Ronquerolles," said the marquis to Madame de Sérizy's brother, "you envied my good fortune when you saw Madame d'Aiglemont, and you reproved me for being unfaithful to her. Bah! you would consider my lot very far from desirable if you had lived, like me, for several years with a pretty woman without daring even to kiss her hand for fear of hurting her. Never burden yourself with such delicate jewels, that are good for nothing but to be kept under glass, and are so fragile and so expensive that we must always treat them with respect. Do you often take out that fine horse of yours, that you're afraid to expose to rain and snow, so I have heard? Well, that's my case. It is true that I am sure of my wife's virtue; but my marriage is a luxury, and if you think I am really married, you're mistaken. So my infidelities are, in some sense, legitimate. I would like right well to know what you would do in my place, my smiling friends! Many men would be less considerate to their wives than I am to mine. I am sure," he added in an undertone, "that Madame d'Aiglemont

has n't the slightest suspicion of anything. So that I certainly should do very wrong to complain — I am very lucky. But nothing is more annoying to a sensitive man than to see a poor creature suffer to whom one is attached."

"You must be exceedingly sensitive then," rejoined M. de Ronquerolles, "for you're rarely at home."

This amiable epigram made the auditors laugh; but Arthur remained unmoved and impenetrable, like a gentleman whose character is based upon gravity. Doubtless the husband's extraordinary words led the young Englishman to form some vague hopes, and he patiently awaited a moment when he should be alone with M. d'Aiglemont. The opportunity soon presented itself.

"Monsieur," he said, "it distresses me beyond words to see the condition of madame la marquise, and if you were aware that, in default of special treatment, she is likely to die a lingering death, I fancy that you would not jest about her suffering. I am in a certain sense justified in speaking thus to you by my certainty that I can save Madame d'Aiglemont and restore her to life and happiness. It is rather unnatural for a man of my rank to be a physician; nevertheless chance willed that I should study medicine. Now, I am so bored," he said, affecting a selfish indifference likely to forward his projects, "that it is of little consequence to me whether I spend my time and my steps for the benefit of a sick woman or in gratifying some foolish whim. Diseases of this sort are rarely cured, because they require a large amount of time and patience and care; above all things one must have plenty of means, must travel, and follow scrupulously prescriptions which vary from day to day and are not at all disagreeable. We are both gentlemen," he continued, using the word in its English signification, "and we can understand each other.

I tell you first of all that, if you accept my proposition, you will be the judge of my conduct every moment. I shall undertake nothing without your advice and overlooking, and I will answer for my success if you agree to follow my instructions. Yes, if you will agree not to be Madame d'Aiglemont's husband for a long time to come," he added in his ear.

"One thing is sure, my lord," laughed the marquis, "and that is that no one but an Englishman could make such an extraordinary proposition. Allow me neither to reject nor accept it, but to think it over. First of all, it must be submitted to my wife."

At that moment Julie reappeared at the piano. She sang the aria from *Semiramide*, "Son regina, son guerriera." Universal, but muffled applause, so to speak, — the restrained acclamation of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, — bore witness to the enthusiasm she aroused.

When d'Aiglemont took his wife home, she noted with a sort of uneasy pleasure the speedy success of her experiment. Her husband, awakened by the rôle she had played, chose to honor her with a passing fantasy, and took a fresh liking to her, as he might have done with an actress. Julie thought it amusing to be treated so — she, a virtuous married woman; she tried to play with her power, and in this first contest her kindness of heart caused her to succumb once more; but that was the most distressing of all the lessons fate had in store for her.

About two or three o'clock in the morning Julie was sitting up in the conjugal bed, musing gloomily; a flickering lamp lighted the room dimly, and the most profound silence reigned. For an hour past the marchioness, suffering keenly from remorse, had been shedding tears whose bitterness can be realized only by women who have been

in similar situations. One must have a temperament like Julie's to feel as she did the horror of a premeditated caress, to be so deeply wounded by a cold kiss — an apostasy of the heart, aggravated by a pitiable prostitution of the body. She despised herself, she cursed marriage, she wished that she were dead; and but for a cry uttered by her daughter, she might (who knows?) have thrown herself through the window to the ground. M. d'Aiglemont was sleeping quietly by her side, not once awakened by the hot tears that she let fall upon him.

The next day Julie succeeded in being cheerful. She summoned courage to appear to be happy and to conceal, not, as before, her melancholy, but an unconquerable disgust. From that day she no longer looked upon herself as a woman beyond reproach. Had she not lied to herself? and was she not, therefore, capable of dissembling? and might she not display surprising craftiness in conjugal misdemeanors? Her marriage was the cause of this *a priori* wickedness which had not as yet shown itself. However, she had already asked herself why she should resist a lover whom she loved when she gave herself, against her inclination and against the laws of nature, to a husband whom she had ceased to love.

All false steps, all crimes perhaps, have for their motive a false argument or an excess of selfishness. Society cannot exist save by the individual sacrifices that the laws demand. If we accept the benefits of society, are we not in honor bound to maintain the conditions to which it owes its existence? Now, the poor creatures without bread, who are obliged to respect the rights of property, are no less to be pitied than women disappointed in their longings and wounded in their natural delicacy.

A few hours after this scene, the secret of which was

buried in the conjugal bed, d'Aiglemont presented Lord Grenville to his wife. Julie received him with a frigid courtesy which did credit to her power of dissimulation. She imposed silence on her heart, veiled her glances, forced her voice to be firm, and was thus able to retain her self-mastery. And having recognized by these means, which are inborn, so to speak, in woman, the full extent of the love she had inspired, Madame d'Aiglemont smiled at the hope of a speedy cure, and offered no further resistance to her husband's desire, who seemed ready to use force to compel her to accept the services of the young doctor. Still, she would not place herself in Lord Grenville's hands until she had studied his language and his manners enough to be sure that he would have the chivalrous generosity to suffer in silence. She had the most absolute power over him, and she was abusing it thus early! Was she not a woman?

Montcontour is an ancient manor-house built on one of the white cliffs at whose feet flows the Loire, not far from the spot where Julie's carriage had stopped in 1814. It is one of the little châteaux of Touraine, white and charming, with carved turrets embroidered like Malines lace; one of those dainty, jaunty châteaux which gaze at their reflections in the waters of the river, with their thickets of mulberry trees, their vineyards, their sunken roads, their long openwork balustrades, their caverns in the cliff, their cloaks of ivy, and their escarpments. The roofs of Montcontour sparkle in the sunshine; all is bright and glowing. A thousand traces of Spain give a touch of poesy to that delightful abode: the golden broom and its bell-shaped flowers perfume the breeze; the air is caressing, the earth everywhere smiles, and everywhere gentle

sorceries envelop one's being, make it slothful and amorous, relax its nerves and lull it to slumber. That lovely and soothing country puts sorrow to sleep and arouses the passions. No one remains cold beneath that cloudless sky, in face of those sparkling waves. There many an ambition dies; there you lie down to rest on the bosom of tranquil happiness, just as the sun sets each evening in its swaddling-clothes of purple and azure.

On a mild evening in August, 1821, two persons were climbing the stony road that ascends the cliffs on which the château is perched, on their way to some higher point, doubtless to enjoy the many fine views to be seen there. They were Julie and Lord Grenville; but this Julie appeared to be a new woman. She had the fresh coloring of health. Her eyes, animated by a fruitful power, shone through a moist vapor like the fluid which imparts an irresistible attraction to the eyes of a child. She smiled radiantly; she was happy in living and comprehended life as it is. By the way in which she lifted her tiny feet it was easy to see that no suffering paralyzed her slightest movement, as before, nor enfeebled her voice or her eyes. Beneath the white silk umbrella that sheltered her from the hot rays of the sun she resembled a young bride beneath her veil, a virgin ready to abandon herself to the enchantments of love.

Arthur escorted her with the zealous attention of a lover; he guided her as one guides a child, pointed out the best parts of the road and the stones to be avoided, showed her a vista through the trees or led her to a flower, always impelled by an unremitting sentiment of kindness, by a delicate purpose, by an intimate knowledge of her well-being — sentiments which seemed to be born in him

no less — nay, more, perhaps — than the motions necessary to his own existence.

The invalid and her physician walked in step, with no indication of surprise at a harmony which evidently had existed since the first day that they walked together; they obeyed the same will; they stopped, arrested by the same sensations; their glances, their words, corresponded to reciprocal thoughts.

Having reached the upper end of a vineyard, they proposed to rest on one of the long white stones which are constantly taken from the caverns hollowed out of the cliffs; but, before sitting down, Julie glanced at the view.

“Oh, what a beautiful country!” she cried. “Let’s put up a tent and live here. Victor! come — come!”

M. d’Aiglemont replied from below with a hunter’s shout, but without quickening his pace; but he looked up at his wife from time to time, when the windings of the path permitted.

Julie inhaled the air with keen pleasure, throwing back her head and bestowing upon Arthur one of the meaning glances in which a clever woman tells her whole thought.

“Oh,” she continued, “I would like to stay here always! Can one ever tire of looking at this lovely valley? Do you know the name of yonder pretty little stream, my lord?”

“It’s the Cise.”

“The Cise,” she repeated. “And down here below us, what is that?”

“The hillsides of the Cher,” he replied.

“And on the right? Oh, that’s Tours! But see what a charming effect the spires of the cathedral produce in the distance!”

She ceased to speak, and let the hand she had extended toward the town fall on Arthur's hand. Together they admired in silence the landscape and the charms of that harmonious scene. The murmuring of the water, the purity of the air and the sky, all were in tune with the thoughts that flocked to their youthful and loving hearts.

"O mon Dieu! how I love this country!" exclaimed Julie, with increasing artless enthusiasm. "Have you lived here long?" she continued, after a pause.

At the question Lord Grenville started.

"It was there," he replied in a melancholy tone, pointing to a clump of walnut trees on the road, "there that I, a prisoner, saw you for the first time."

"Yes, but I was very depressed then; the country looked very wild to me; but now —"

She paused; Lord Grenville dared not look at her.

"It is to you," Julie began again after a long silence, "that I owe this pleasure. Must not one be alive to feel the joys of life? and until lately I was dead to everything! You have given me more than health — you have taught me to realize its full value."

Women have an inimitable talent for expressing their feeling without using words that are too ardent; their eloquence lies above all in the accent, the gesture, the attitude, the glance. Lord Grenville hid his face in his hands, for tears were gathering in his eyes. This acknowledgment was the first that Julie had offered him since they left Paris. For a whole year he had treated her for her illness with the most absolute devotion. Seconded by d'Aiglemont, he had taken her to Aix to take the waters, then to the seashore at La Rochelle. Keeping watch from moment to moment upon the changes which his



judicious but simple prescriptions produced upon Julie's impaired constitution, he had cultivated her as a rare flower is cultivated by an enthusiastic horticulturist.

The marchioness seemed to accept Arthur's intelligent care with all the selfishness of a Parisian accustomed to homage, or with the heedlessness of a courtesan who knows neither the cost of things nor the worth of men, and prizes them according to the measure of their usefulness to her.

The influence exerted on the mind by the place where one happens to be is worthy of remark. If melancholy infallibly steals over us when we are on the seashore, another law of our impressible nature decrees that on the mountains our sentiments become purified; there passion gains in intensity what it seems to lose in vivacity. The outlook over the broad basin of the Loire, the elevation of the little hill on which the two lovers were seated, may have caused the delicious tranquillity in which they first tasted the bliss wherewith one divines the extent of a passion concealed beneath words apparently without meaning.

As Julie finished the sentence that moved Lord Grenville so deeply, a soft breeze swayed the tree-tops and filled the air with the coolness of the stream; a few clouds covered the sun, and the light shadows disclosed all the charms of that pretty scene. Julie turned her head away, to hide from the young nobleman the tears that she succeeded in forcing back and in drying, for Arthur's emotion had speedily infected her. She dared not raise her eyes to his, lest he should read too much joy in her glance. Her woman's instinct told her that at that perilous moment she must bury her love in the depths of her heart. However, silence might be no less to be dreaded. When she

saw that Lord Grenville was not in a condition to utter a word, she continued in a soft voice: —

“You are touched by what I said, my lord. Perhaps this keen sensibility is the method that a gracious and kindly heart like yours adopts to correct a false judgment. You must have thought me ungrateful, finding me so cold and reserved, or so frivolous and insensible, during this journey which, happily, is so soon to end. I should not have been worthy to receive your care if I had not been able to appreciate it. I have forgotten nothing, my lord. Alas! I shall forget nothing — neither the solicitude which made you watch over me as a mother watches over her child, nor above all the noble confidence of our brotherly interviews, the delicacy of your whole conduct — seductions these against which we women are all without weapons. My lord, it is beyond my power to reward you.”

As she said this Julie hastily moved away, and Lord Grenville made no motion to detain her. She walked to a rock a short distance away, and stood there motionless. Their emotions were a secret to themselves; doubtless they wept silently; the songs of the birds, so joyous, so lavish of expressions of affection at sunset, must have increased the violent agitation which had compelled them to separate. Nature took it upon herself to express for them a love which they dared not mention.

“Well, my lord,” Julie resumed, placing herself before Arthur in a dignified attitude which enabled her to take his hand, “I will ask you to make pure and holy the life that you have given back to me. Here we must part. I know,” she added, seeing that he turned pale, “that, as the reward of your devotion, I am going to demand of you a sacrifice even greater than those whose extent should be

more fittingly recognized by me. But I must do it. You will not remain in France. To enjoin it upon you is to give you, is it not, rights which will be sacred to you?" she added, placing the young man's hand upon her throbbing heart.

"Yes," said Arthur, rising.

He pointed to d'Aiglemont, who appeared, with his daughter in his arms, on the balustrade of the château, on the other side of a sunken road. He had climbed up there to give his little Hélène a jump.

"Julie, I will say nothing of my love — our hearts understand each other too well. However deeply buried, however secret, the joys of my heart, you have shared them all. I feel it, I know it, I see it. And now I obtain the sweet proof of the constant sympathy of our hearts. But I will fly. I have planned too skilfully and too often the means of killing that man to be able to hold my hand forever if I should stay with you."

"I have had the same thought," she said, her troubled face betraying the signs of painful surprise.

But there was so much of virtue, of certainty of herself, and the tale of so many victories secretly won over love, in Julie's accent and gesture, that Lord Grenville was dumb with admiration. Even the shadow of crime had vanished from that ingenuous conscience. The religious feeling that reigned upon that noble brow would always banish thence the involuntary evil thoughts engendered by our imperfect nature, but which show at once the grandeur and the dangers of our destiny.

"In that case," she continued, "I should have incurred your contempt, and it would have saved me. To lose your esteem," she added, lowering her eyes, "was not that like death to me?"

The two heroic lovers were silent again for a moment, devouring their sufferings: good or bad, their thoughts were loyally identical, and they agreed as well in their intimate joys as in their most hidden griefs.

"I ought not to complain; the wretchedness of my life is my own work," said Julie, looking upward, her eyes filled with tears.

"My lord," cried the general from his perch, pointing into the valley, "this is where we first met. Don't you remember? See, down yonder, by those poplars."

The Englishman replied with a brusque nod.

"I am destined to die young and unhappy," said Julie. "Yes, do not imagine that I shall live. Grief will be as fatal as the terrible disease could have been of which you cured me. I do not consider myself blameworthy. No, the sentiments you have aroused in me are irresistible, everlasting, but quite involuntary, and I mean to remain virtuous. Meanwhile I shall be true alike to my conscience as a wife, to my duties as a mother, and to the aspirations of my heart. Listen," she added in an altered voice, "I shall never belong to that man again, never!"

And with an emphatic gesture of horror and of sincerity Julie pointed to her husband.

"The laws of the world," she continued, "call upon me to make his life happy, and I will obey them; I will be his servant; my devotion to him will know no bounds; but from this day I am a widow. I do not choose to prostitute myself either in my own eyes or in those of society; if I am not Monsieur d'Aiglemont's, I shall never be another's. You will have of me only what you have extorted from me. That is the sentence I have passed upon myself," she said, looking proudly at Arthur. "It is irrevocable, my lord. And now understand, that if you should yield to a criminal

thought, Monsieur d'Aiglemont's wife would enter a convent either in Italy or in Spain. Evil fortune willed that we should speak of our love. These confessions were unavoidable perhaps. But let it be for the last time that our hearts have throbbed so wildly. To-morrow you will pretend to receive a letter that summons you to England, and we will part, never to meet again."

Exhausted by this effort, Julie felt that her knees were shaking; she had a deadly chill, and, obeying a truly feminine impulse, she sat down in order not to fall into Arthur's arms.

"Julie!" he cried.

That piercing cry echoed like a peal of thunder. The heart-rending clamor expressed all that the lover, hitherto mute, had been unable to say.

"Well, well, what 's the matter with her?" queried the general, who, on hearing the cry, had set off at a run and speedily stood before the lovers.

"It won't amount to anything," said Julie, with the admirable coolness which the natural craft of women enables them often to summon to their aid in the great crises of life. "The fresh breeze from these walnuts nearly made me swoon, and my doctor must have been frightened to death. You see I am, in his eyes, like a work of art that is n't yet finished. He may have dreaded that he was about to see it destroyed."

She boldly took Lord Grenville's arm, smiled at her husband, glanced at the landscape before leaving the summit of the cliffs, and led her companion away by the hand.

"This is certainly the finest view we have seen," she said; "I shall never forget it. Just see, Victor, what distances, what an extent of country, and what variety! This country gives me an idea of love."

Laughing almost convulsively, but in a way to deceive her husband, she jumped gayly down into the sunken road and disappeared.

"Ah me! so soon!" she said, when they were at some distance from M. d'Aiglemont. "What! in another moment, my friend, we cannot be, shall never again be ourselves — in short, we shall cease to live."

"Let us walk slowly," replied Lord Grenville; "the carriages are still at some distance. We will walk together, and if it is possible to put words in our looks, our hearts will live a moment longer."

They walked along the embankment, by the river, in the last rays of daylight, almost silently, saying vague words, soft as the murmur of the Loire, but which stirred their very souls. The sun, as it was setting, enveloped them in its ruddy beams before it disappeared — a melancholy image of their fatal love.

Much disturbed at not finding his carriage at the place where he had stopped, the general followed or went before the lovers, taking no part in their conversation. The dignity and delicacy of Lord Grenville's conduct through their journeyings had silenced the marquis's suspicions, and for some time past he had left his wife unhampered, trusting in the physician-lord's punic faith.

Arthur and Julie walked on in the melancholy and sorrowful accord of their wounded hearts. A little earlier, as they climbed the steep slopes of Montcontour, they had both had a vague hope, an unquiet happiness which they dared not try to explain. But when they went down the river bank they had overturned the frail edifice erected in their imaginations, upon which they had not dared to breathe, like children who fear the fall of the card-houses they have built. They were without hope.

That same evening Lord Grenville went away. The last glance that he bestowed upon Julie unhappily proved that, from the moment when the power of sympathy had revealed to them the intensity of their passion, he had had good reason to distrust himself.

The next day, when M. d'Aiglemont and his wife were seated on the back seat of their carriage, without their travelling companion, and were driving rapidly over the route travelled in 1814 by the marchioness, then ignorant of love, and almost prepared to curse the idea of constancy, she recalled innumerable forgotten impressions. The heart has its own memory. The same woman who is incapable of remembering the most momentous events will often remember all her life things which bear upon her sentiments. Thus Julie had a perfect recollection even of trivial details. She recalled with pleasure the slightest incidents of her previous journey, and even the thoughts that had come to her mind at certain points.

Victor, having become passionately enamoured of his wife once more since she had recovered the freshness of youth and all her beauty, sat very close to her, after the manner of lovers. When he tried to take her in his arms, she gently disengaged herself, and found I know not what pretext to avoid that harmless endearment. Ere long she was sickened by his mere touch, for she felt and shared his ardor by reason of the way they were sitting. She attempted to sit by herself on the front seat; but her husband was gracious enough to leave her alone on the back seat. She thanked him for that attention by a sigh which he misinterpreted, and the one-time garrison Don Juan, construing his wife's melancholy to his own advantage, placed her before nightfall under the necessity of speaking to him with a firmness which had its due effect.

"My dear," she said, "you have already come near killing me, and you know it. If I were still an inexperienced girl, I might begin again the sacrifice of my life; but I am a mother, I have a daughter to bring up, and I owe myself to her no less than to you. Let us make the best of a misfortune which affects us equally. You are the less to be pitied. Have n't you been able to find sources of consolation from which my duty, our common honor, and, more than all else, nature, shut me out? See," she added, "you carelessly left three letters from Madame de Sérizy in an open drawer; here they are. My silence is proof enough that you have in me a most indulgent wife, who does not demand of you the sacrifices to which the law condemns her. But I have reflected enough to be sure that our rôles are not the same, and that woman alone is predestined to unhappiness. My virtue rests upon matured and fixed principles. I shall be able to live irreproachably; but let me live."

The marquis, abashed by the logic that women are apt at studying in the bright light of love, was vanquished by the dignity natural to them in crises of this sort. The instinctive repulsion that Julie manifested for everything that interfered with her love and the cravings of her heart is one of the most beautiful qualities of woman, and is due, perhaps, to an inborn virtue which neither laws nor civilization will ever impose silence upon. But who, pray, would dare to blame a woman therefor? When she has put to silence the sentiment of exclusiveness which does not permit her to belong to two men, is she not like a priest without faith? Even though some strait-laced minds may condemn the compromise, so to speak, arranged by Julie between her conjugal duties and her love, all passionate souls will esteem it a crime. Such general



condemnation denotes either the misery which attends disobedience to the laws, or deplorable imperfections in the institutions upon which European society rests.

Two years passed, during which M. and Madame d'Aiglemont led the life of people of fashion, going their respective ways, meeting in salons more frequently than under their own roof: a sort of fashionable divorce in which many marriages in high life end. One evening, by an extraordinary coincidence, the husband and wife found themselves together in their own salon. Madame d'Aiglemont had had a friend of her own to dinner, and the general, who always dined out, had stayed at home.

"You are going to be very fortunate, madame la marquise," he said, placing on the table the cup from which he had just drunk his coffee. He glanced at Madame de Wimphen with a half-mischievous, half-grieved expression, and added: "I am going on a long hunting expedition, with the grand huntsman. You will be absolutely a widow for at least a week, and that is what you like, I imagine. — Guillaume," he said to the footman who came in to take away the cups, "order the horses."

Madame de Wimphen was the same Louisa to whom Madame d'Aiglemont had once proposed to advise celibacy. The two women exchanged a glance of intelligence which showed that Julie had found in her friend a confidante of her woes — an invaluable and kindly-disposed confidante, for Madame de Wimphen was very happy in her marriage; and in their contrasted situations it may be that the happiness of the one was a guaranty of her devotion to the other's misery. In such cases the dissimilarity of fortunes is almost always a potent bond of affection.

"Is this the hunting season?" inquired Julie, with an indifferent glance at her husband.

It was near the end of March.

"The grand huntsman hunts, madame, when and where he chooses. We are going to the royal forest to kill wild boar."

"Look out that nothing happens to you."

"An accident is always unexpected," he replied with a smile.

"Monsieur's carriage is ready," said Guillaume.

The general rose, kissed Madame de Wimphen's hand, and turned to Julie.

"Suppose, madame, that I should be killed by a boar?" he said, with a supplicating expression.

"What does that mean?" asked Madame de Wimphen.

"Nonsense! come here," said Julie to her husband.

Then she smiled, as if to say to Louisa, "Now, you will see."

She held out her neck toward Victor, who stepped forward to kiss her; but she stooped so that the conjugal kiss touched the ruffle about her neck.

"You will bear me witness before God," said the marquis to Madame de Wimphen, "that I need a firman to obtain this slight favor. That is my wife's idea of love. She has led me to this by heaven knows what wiles. — Much pleasure to you!"

And he left the room.

"Why, your poor husband is really awfully good," cried Louisa, when the two women were alone. "He loves you."

"Oh, don't add a syllable to that word! The name I bear is a perfect nightmare to me."

"True, but Victor obeys you implicitly," said Louisa.

"His obedience," rejoined Julie, "is founded in part on the great esteem I have inspired in him. I am an exceedingly virtuous woman, so far as the laws are concerned; I make his house pleasant to him, I close my eyes to his intrigues, I make no inroads on his fortune; he can squander his income as he pleases; I take good care simply to keep the capital intact. At this price I have peace. He does n't understand, or does n't choose to understand, my mode of life. But, although I lead my husband thus, I am not free from fear as to the effects of his disposition. I am like a bear-leader who is in mortal terror lest the muzzle may break some day. If Victor should consider himself justified in ceasing to esteem me, I dare not think about what may happen; for he is violent, overflowing with self-esteem, and, above all, with vanity. If his wit is n't shrewd enough to adopt a reasonable course, some day in a delicate conjuncture, when his evil passions are aroused, he is of so weak a character that he might kill me provisionally, and die of grief the next day. But such deadly good fortune is not to be feared."

There was a brief pause, during which the thoughts of the two friends were turned upon the unspoken cause of this state of affairs.

"I have been very cruelly obeyed," continued Julie, with a meaning glance at Louisa; "but I did n't forbid *him* to write me. Oh, *he* has forgotten me, and he has done well! It would be altogether too wretched if his life were shattered! is n't mine enough? Would you believe, my dear, that I read the English papers solely in the hope of seeing his name in print? Well, he has n't yet appeared in the House of Lords."

"Do you know English, pray?"

"Did n't I tell you? I have learned it."

"Poor love!" cried Louisa, grasping Julie's hand, "but how can you go on living?"

"That 's a secret," replied Julie, with a gesture almost infantile in its naïveté. "Listen: I take opium. The story of the Duchess of — in London gave me the idea. Maturin made a novel of it, you know. My doses of laudanum are very weak. I sleep. I am awake only seven hours, and those I give to my daughter."

Louisa looked at the fire, not daring to meet the eyes of her friend, all of whose causes of unhappiness were made clear to her for the first time.

"Keep my secret, Louisa," said Julie, after a moment's silence.

Suddenly a footman came in and handed the marchioness a letter.

"Ah!" she cried, turning pale.

"I won't ask whom it 's from," said Madame de Wimphen.

The marchioness was reading and did not hear: her friend, watching, saw the most intense feeling, the most dangerous excitement, appear on her face, as she turned red and white alternately. At last she threw the paper into the fire.

"That 's an incendiary letter! Oh, my heart is bursting!"

She sprang to her feet and paced the floor; her eyes were flaming.

"He has n't left Paris!" she exclaimed.

Her disjointed speech, which Madame de Wimphen dared not interrupt, was broken by terrifying pauses. After each pause the words came in a more and more intense tone. There was something horrible in the concluding words.

"He has not ceased to see me, without my knowledge. A glance from me, caught on the wing every day, has been enough to keep him alive. Think of it, Louisa — he is dying and asks leave to bid me adieu! he knows that my husband has gone away to-night for several days, and he will be here in a moment. Oh, I shall die! I am lost! Pray, pray stay with me! Before two women he won't dare! Oh, stay! I am afraid of myself."

"But my husband knows that I dined with you," said Madame de Wimphen, "and he is coming to fetch me."

"Very well — before you go, I will have sent him away. I will be executioner to us both. Alas! he will think that I no longer love him. And that letter! Why, my dear, there were sentences in it that I can see now, written in letters of fire!"

A carriage stopped at the door.

"Ah!" cried the marchioness, joyfully, "he comes publicly and with no secrecy."

"Lord Grenville," announced the footman.

The marchioness stood to receive him, like a statue. Seeing how pale and thin and haggard he was, severity was utterly out of the question. Although Lord Grenville was terribly disappointed not to find Julie alone, he appeared calm and cool. But to those two who were aware of his secret passion, his countenance, the sound of his voice, his expression, had a something of the power attributed to the cramp-fish. They were as if benumbed by the swift contagion of a terrible sorrow.

The sound of Lord Grenville's voice made Julie's heart throb so violently that she dared not answer him for fear of disclosing the extent of his power over her. Lord Grenville dared not look at her, so that Madame de Wimphen carried the main burden of a listless conversation. With

a glance full of touching gratitude Julie thanked her for her assistance. The lovers imposed silence on their feelings and were fain to restrain themselves within the bounds prescribed by duty and the proprieties.

But before long Monsieur de Wimphen was announced. When he appeared, the two friends exchanged a glance, and realized without speech the new awkwardness of the situation. It was impossible to make M. de Wimphen a party to the secret of the drama, and Louisa had no plausible reason to give her husband for wishing to stay with her friend.

When she was putting on her shawl, Julie rose as if to help her, and whispered to her:—

“I will be brave. If he came to my house without concealment, what can I fear? But, if you had not been here, when I saw how changed he is, I should have fallen at his feet in that first moment.— Well, Arthur, so you did n’t obey me,” she said in a trembling voice, as she returned to her seat on a *causeuse*, where Grenville dared not join her.

“I could not resist any longer the pleasure of hearing your voice, of being with you. It was like madness, delirium. I am no longer master of myself. I have taken counsel of myself, and I am too weak. I must die soon. But to die without seeing you, without hearing the rustling of your gown, without gathering your tears— what a death!”

He started away from Julie, but his sudden movement caused a pistol to fall from his pocket. The marchioness gazed at the weapon with eyes in which there could no longer be read either passion or thought. Lord Grenville picked up the pistol and seemed profoundly vexed by an accident which might be looked upon as a lover’s trick.

“Arthur?” said Julie.

"Madame," he replied, looking down, "I was in despair when I came; I meant —"

He paused.

"You meant to kill yourself in my house!" she cried.

"Not alone," he said in a low tone.

"Oh! my husband, perhaps?"

"No, no!" he exclaimed in a stifled voice. "But do not be alarmed," he continued, "my fatal project has vanished. When I came in here, when I saw you, then I felt that I had the courage to keep silent, and to die alone."

She rose and threw herself into his arms; and he, despite her violent sobs, distinguished a word or two instinct with passion.

"To know happiness and die! Well — yes!"

Julie's whole story was contained in that wild cry — a cry of nature and of love to which women who have no religious faith succumb. Arthur seized her and carried her to the couch with a sudden movement marked by all the violence born of unhopèd-for good fortune. But in another moment she snatched herself from her lover's arms, gazed at him with the fixed glare of a desperate woman, took his hand, seized a candle, and dragged him into her bedroom; then, having reached the bed where H  l  ne was sleeping, she gently pushed the curtains aside and revealed the child, placing a hand before the candle so that the light should not hurt the little girl's eyes through their transparent and hardly closed lids. H  l  ne's arms were open, and she was smiling in her sleep.

Julie called Lord Grenville's attention to her with a glance. That glance left nothing unsaid.

"A husband we can abandon even when he loves us. A man is strong, he has his consolations. We can disregard social laws. But a motherless child!"

All these thoughts, and a thousand others even more affecting, were in that glance.

"We can take her with us," whispered the Englishman; "I will love her dearly."

"Mamma!" said Hélène, opening her eyes.

At that word Julie burst into tears. Lord Grenville sat down and folded his arms, silent and sombre.

"Mamma!" that pretty, artless exclamation awoke such a crowd of noble sentiments and irresistible sympathies, that love was crushed for a moment beneath the potent voice of motherhood. Julie was no longer a woman, she was a mother. Nor did Lord Grenville long resist; Julie's tears prevailed.

A moment later a door was thrown open noisily and the words, "Are you in here, Madame d'Aiglemont?" echoed like a thunder-clap in the lovers' hearts. The marquis had returned. Before Julie could recover her self-possession the general was on his way from his own room to hers. The two rooms were very near together. Luckily Julie made a sign to Lord Grenville, who jumped into a dressing-room, the door of which Julie hastily closed.

"Well, my dear wife, here I am," said Victor. "The hunt did n't come off. I am going to bed."

"Good-night," she said; "I am going to do the same. So let me undress."

"You are very cross to-night. I obey, madame la marquise."

The general returned to his bedroom; Julie accompanied him, to close the door, then rushed back to set Lord Grenville free. She recovered all her presence of mind, and reflected that her doctor's call was a perfectly natural occurrence; she might have left him in the salon while



she went to put her daughter to bed, and she proposed to tell him to go back there quietly.

But when she opened the dressing-room door, she uttered a piercing shriek: Lord Grenville's fingers had been caught and crushed in the crack.

"Well, well! what 's the trouble?" her husband called out.

"Nothing at all," she replied; "I just ran a pin into my finger."

The door between the rooms suddenly flew open. The marchioness thought that her husband was coming back out of concern for her, and she cursed that solicitude with which the heart had naught to do. She had barely time to close the dressing-room door again, and Lord Grenville had not succeeded in freeing his hand.

The general did in fact come back; but his wife was mistaken; he had come in his own interest.

"Can you lend me a silk handkerchief?" he asked. "That rascal Charles has left me without a single handkerchief for my head. When we were first married you used to meddle in my affairs with such painstaking zeal that you worried me. Ah! the honeymoon's all over for me and for my cravats. Now I am given over to the secular arm of these fellows who make a fool of me, all of them."

"Here 's a silk handkerchief. — Did n't you go into the salon?"

"No."

"You might have found Lord Grenville there."

"Is he in Paris?"

"It would seem so."

"Oh! I 'll go now — the dear doctor!"

"But he must have gone!" cried Julie.

At that moment the marquis was in the centre of his wife's bedroom, putting the silk handkerchief about his head and looking at himself with a self-satisfied air in the glass.

"I don't know where all our people can be," he said. "I have rung for Charles three times already, and he has n't appeared. Where 's your maid? Just ring for her, will you? I 'd like another blanket on my bed to-night."

"Pauline has gone out," rejoined Julie, shortly.

"At midnight!"

"I let her go to the opera."

"That 's strange," said the marquis, undressing. "I thought I saw her when I came upstairs."

"Then she must have come home," said Julie, feigning impatience.

And then, to avoid arousing any suspicion in her husband's mind, she pulled the bell-rope, but very gently.

All the occurrences of that night were never entirely known; but no doubt they were all as simple and ghastly as the commonplace domestic incidents that preceded it. The next day the Marquise d'Aiglemont took to her bed for several days.

"What on earth has happened at your house of such an extraordinary nature that everybody 's talking about your wife?" M. de Ronquerolles asked M. d'Aiglemont a few days after that night of catastrophes.

"Take my advice and remain a bachelor," said d'Aiglemont. "The curtains of Hélène's bed caught fire; my wife had such a shock that she 's sick again for a year, the doctor says. You marry a girl in blooming health, she becomes sickly; you think that she 's passionate, and she 's cold as a stone; or else, being cold outwardly, she

is really so passionate that she kills you or dishonors you. Sometimes the sweetest of creatures becomes cross-grained, but the cross-grained never turn sweet; sometimes the child you have taken to your heart a weak, foolish creature, displays in opposition to you an iron will and the wit of a demon, I am tired of marriage."

"Or of your wife."

"That could hardly be. By the way, will you go to Saint-Thomas d'Aquin with me, to Lord Grenville's funeral?"

"A curious pastime. But tell me,' added Ronquerolles, "is the cause of his death known?"

"His servant declares that he passed the whole of one night on the outer sill of a window, to save his mistress's honor; and it has been devilish cold of late!"

"Such devotion would be most exemplary in one of us old stagers; but Lord Grenville was young and — an Englishman. Those English are always trying to do something out of the ordinary."

"Psha!" replied d'Aiglemont, "such heroic deeds depend on the woman who inspires them, and it certainly was n't for my wife that poor Arthur died!"

## II.

## SECRET SUFFERING.

BETWEEN the Seine and the small stream of the Loing stretches a vast plain bordered by the forest of Fontainebleau and by the towns of Moret, Nemours, and Montereau. This arid region presents to the eye only an occasional small hill; here and there, amid the fields, a few square rods of forest which serve as a retreat for game; and everywhere, those endless lines, gray or yellowish, peculiar to the horizons of La Sologne, La Beauce, and Berri.

In the centre of this plain, between Moret and Montereau, the traveller espies an old château called Saint-Lange, the approaches to which lack neither grandeur nor majesty. There are magnificent avenues of elms, moats, high enclosing walls, immense gardens, and the endless seignorial buildings the construction of which required the profits of iniquitous taxation, of the farming out of the revenues, and the legalized speculations, or the great aristocratic fortunes, destroyed to-day by the sledgehammer of the Civil Code. If an artist or dreamer should wander at random along the deep-rutted roads or among the heavy fields that challenge approach to this region, he would wonder by what caprice that poetic château was dropped into that level plain of wheat, that desert of chalk, marl, and sand, where merriment expires, where melancholy inevitably is born in the heart, where the spirit is

incessantly wearied by a voiceless solitude, by a monotonous landscape, by negative beauties, which, however, are most favorable to those sufferings which desire no consolation.

A young woman celebrated in Paris for her charm, her beauty, and her wit, and whose social position and fortune were in harmony with her eminent reputation, took up her abode, toward the close of the year 1820, at Saint-Lange, to the vast amazement of the little village that lies about a mile away. The farmers and peasants had seen none of the family at the château from time immemorial. Although it yielded considerable revenue, the estate was given over to the care of a steward and was kept up by old servants. So it was that the appearance of madame la marquise caused much excitement in the neighborhood.

Several persons were standing together at the extremity of the village, in the courtyard of a wretched inn that stood at the fork of the roads to Nemours and Moret, watching a calèche that approached slowly, for the marchioness had come from Paris with her own horses. On the front seat sat a lady's maid, holding in her lap a little girl who seemed rather thoughtful than laughter-loving. The mother reclined in the back seat, like a dying woman sent into the country by her doctor. The delicate young woman's evident prostration gave little satisfaction to the village politicians, who had looked forward to her arrival at Saint-Lange as likely to arouse activity of some sort in the commune. Surely any sort of activity was manifestly antipathetic to that pain-ridden creature.

The most sapient wiseacre in the village of Saint-Lange declared that evening, at the wine-shop, in the room where the village notabilities were drinking, that, judging from the sadness depicted on madame la marquise's features, she must be ruined. In the absence of monsieur

le marquis, whom the newspapers mentioned as about to attend the Duc d'Angoulême into Spain, she had come to Saint-Lange to save the amount necessary to pay the differences due as a result of unfortunate speculations on the Bourse. The marquis was one of the greatest of gamblers. Perhaps the estate would be sold in small parcels. In that case there 'd be some good bargains to be had. They had all better be counting up their cash, taking it from its hiding-place, and getting their resources together, in order to have their share in the demolition of Saint-Lange.

The prospect seemed so inviting that each notability, impatient to learn whether it was well founded, deliberated upon the possibility of finding out the truth through the servants at the château; but none of them could throw any light on the catastrophe which brought their mistress, in the dead of winter, to her ancient château of Saint-Lange, when she had other estates renowned for the beauty of their surroundings and their gardens.

Monsieur le maire called to present his respects to madame, but was not received. After the mayor, the steward presented himself, with no better success.

Madame la marquise left her room only to allow it to be put in order, and during that time remained in a small salon near by, where she dined, if it can be called dining to seat one's self at table, glance at the dishes with disgust, and eat the precise amount necessary to keep one from starving to death. Then she returned at once to the old-fashioned *bergère*, on which she reclined, from morning till night, in the embrasure of the only window in her bedroom. She saw her daughter only during the few moments spent at her dismal repast, and even then she seemed to endure her presence with difficulty. Can anything less

than some indescribable grief put the maternal sentiment to silence in a young mother? None of her servants had access to her. Her maid was the only person whose services were acceptable to her. She insisted upon absolute silence in the château; her daughter was obliged to play at a distance. It was so hard for her to endure the slightest noise, that any human voice, even her child's, affected her unpleasantly.

The people of the neighborhood were much engrossed by her peculiarities at first; but when all possible conjectures had been advanced, neither the small towns about nor the peasants gave another thought to the invalid.

Left to herself, therefore, the marchioness could remain perfectly silent amid the silence she had ordained about her, and had no occasion to leave the tapestried apartment in which her grandmother died, and whither she had come to die peacefully, without witnesses, without annoyances, without having to submit to the lying demonstrations of selfishness cloaked with affection which inflict a twofold agony on the dying in large cities.

She was twenty-six years old. At that age a heart still filled with poetic illusions loves to taste of death when it seems beneficent. But death is coquettish with young people: with them it advances and withdraws, appears and disappears; its slow approach disenchants them, and their uncertainty touching the morrow finally drives them back into the world, where they fall in with sorrow which, more pitiless than death, strikes them without making them wait for it. Now, this woman who refused to live was about to feel the bitterness of death's delays in the depths of her solitude, and to serve there, in a mental agony which death would not end, a terrible apprenticeship to egotism, which was destined to take the bloom off

her heart, and to refashion it for commerce with the world.

Such cruel and melancholy knowledge is always the result of our first sorrows. The marchioness was really suffering for the first, and, it may be, for the only time in her life. In truth, would it not be a mistake to think that the sentiments change? Once matured, do they not always exist in the depths of the heart? They become quiescent there, and awake again at the pleasure of the accidents of life; but they remain there, and their presence necessarily modifies the whole being. Thus every sentiment would have but one great day — the day, longer or shorter, of its first tempest. Thus sorrow, the most constant of our sentiments, would be keen only at its first outburst; and its subsequent attacks would grow weaker and weaker, whether by reason of our becoming accustomed to its paroxysms, or in obedience to a law of our nature which, in order to keep itself alive, meets this destructive force with an equal, but inert, force derived from the scheming of selfishness.

But, among all the forms of suffering, to which does this name "sorrow" belong? The loss of one's parents is a grief for which nature has prepared mankind; physical pain is not lasting; it does not extend to the soul, and if it persists, it is no longer pain, but death. Let a young wife lose a new-born child, conjugal love soon gives her a successor. That affliction, too, is ephemeral. In short, these griefs, and many other similar ones, are, in some sense, blows, wounds; but none of them affect our vitality in its essence, and they must follow one another in extraordinarily swift succession to kill the sentiment which impels us to seek happiness. Great sorrow, therefore, genuine sorrow is suffering so deadly as to wipe out at one fell



swoop past, present, and future, to leave no part of life unimpaired, to warp the mind forever, to inscribe itself ineffaceably on the lips and the brow, to shatter or relax the springs of enjoyment by planting in the heart a feeling of disgust for everything on earth. Furthermore, to be truly immense, to weigh thus upon mind and body, this affliction must fall at a time of life when all the powers of mind and body are young, and must strike a heart that is keenly alive. At such a time it makes a deep wound; terrible is the suffering, and no mortal can recover from its effects without some poetic change: he either takes the road to heaven, or, if he remains on earth, he returns to the world to lie to the world, to play a part therein; he knows thenceforth the wings to which the actors retire to scheme, to weep, to jest. After this momentous crisis, there are no more mysteries in social life, which is irrevocably judged.

In young women of the age of the marchioness, this first, most poignant of all sorrows, is always caused by the same thing. A woman, especially a young woman, as great in character as in beauty, never fails to place her life where nature, sentiment, and society impel her to risk it altogether. If that manner of life is found wanting, and she remains on earth, she undergoes the most agonizing suffering, for the reason that makes first love the most beautiful of all sentiments.

Why has this form of wretchedness never had either painter or poet? But can it be painted? can it be sung? No; the nature of the sorrows it gives birth to defies analysis and the colors of art. Moreover, these sorrows are never confided to another; to console a woman for them, one must be able to divine them; for, being always received with bitterness and religiously concealed, they remain in

the heart, as an avalanche, falling into a valley, crushes everything in its path before making a place for itself.

The marchioness was at this time in the grasp of those sufferings which remain long unknown, because everybody condemns them; whereas sentiment encourages them, and a true woman's conscience always justifies them to her. It is with them as with children who are infallibly destined to be cast out of life, and who are attached to the hearts of their mothers by stronger bonds than are children more fortunately endowed. Never perhaps had this frightful catastrophe which kills all that there is of life outside our own selves been so sudden and so complete, so cruelly aggravated by circumstances, as in the case of the marchioness. A man dearly loved, young and noble-minded, whose prayers she had never granted, in order to obey the laws of society, had died to save for her what society calls "a wife's honor"! To whom could she say: "I suffer horribly"? Law and morals forbade her complaints; a female friend would have gloated over them, a man would have speculated upon them. No, the poor afflicted creature could weep at her ease only in a desert, consume her suffering there or be consumed by it, die or kill something within her — her conscience perchance.

For several days she lay with her eyes fixed upon a flat landscape where, as in her future life, there was nothing to seek, nothing to hope for; where everything could be seen at a single glance, and where she encountered images of the cold desolation which unceasingly rent her heart. The misty mornings, a sky of pale blue, clouds floating near the earth beneath a grayish pall, coincided with the phases of her moral malady. Her heart did not contract, was not ever so little withered; no, her fresh and blooming personality was petrified by the slow action of an

unendurable sorrow, because she had no object in life. She suffered through and for herself. To suffer thus is to dip one's foot in selfishness, is it not? Horrible thoughts passed through her mind and wounded it. She questioned herself in good faith and found herself twofold. There were in her a woman who reasoned and a woman who felt, a woman who suffered and a woman who longed to suffer no more. She went back to the pleasures of her childhood, which had passed without realization of its happiness, and those unsullied images rushed back in a throng as if to point out to her the disappointments of a marriage suitable in the world's eyes but ghastly in reality. Of what use to her had been her lovely maiden modesty, her repressed longings, and the sacrifices made to the world? Although everything about her expressed and seemed to await love, she asked herself of what avail now were her grace of movement, her smile, and her charm. She no more liked to think of herself as still fresh and voluptuous than one likes a sound repeated again and again for no purpose. Her very beauty was intolerable to her, as a useless thing. She foresaw with horror that she could not be a complete being thenceforth. Her interior *ego* had lost the power to enjoy fresh impressions with the delicious sense of newness that lends so much joy to living. In the future, most of her sensations would be effaced as soon as evoked, and many of those which formerly had moved her would become indifferent to her.

After the infancy of the creature comes the infancy of the heart. Now, her lover had carried with him to the grave this second infancy. Young still in her desires, she no longer had that complete youthfulness of spirit which imparts to everything in love its worth and its savor. Would she not retain within herself a germ of melancholy, of

distrust, which would rob her emotions of their sudden bloom, of their enthusiasm? for nothing henceforth could give her the happiness which she had hoped for, which she had dreamed of as so beautiful.

Her first genuine tears extinguished the heavenly fire that lights the first emotions of the heart; she was destined always to suffer for not being what she might have been. From this belief would come the bitter disgust that leads one to turn the head when pleasure presents itself anew. She looked upon life as does an old man on the point of quitting it. Although she felt young, the dead weight of her joyless days fell upon her spirit, crushed it, and made her old before her time. She asked the world, with a shriek of despair, what it had to give her in exchange for the love which helped her to live and which she had lost. She asked herself whether, in her vanished love, pure and chaste as it was, her thoughts had not been more criminal than her acts. She took pleasure in proving herself blameworthy, in order to flout the world, and to console herself for not having had with him whom she lamented that perfect communication which, by placing two hearts one upon another, lessens the sorrow of the one left behind by the certainty of having enjoyed perfect happiness. She was as discontented as an actress who has failed in her rôle, for her sorrow attacked her every fibre — heart and head alike. While nature was thwarted in its dearest desires, vanity was no less wounded than the kindness of heart that impels a woman to sacrifice herself. Then, too, by raising all sorts of questions, by playing upon all the cords of the various existences which we owe to our social, moral, and physical natures, she relaxed so completely the powers of her mind, that amid the most contradictory reflections she could grasp nothing.

Sometimes, when the mist was falling, she opened her window and stood there, without thought, breathing mechanically the damp earthly odor that filled the air — motionless, inane in appearance, for the rumbling of her sorrows made her deaf alike to the harmonies of nature and the charms of thought.

One day, about noon, when the sun had just broken through the mist, her maid came in unsummoned and said:

“This is the fourth time monsieur le curé has come to see madame la marquise, and he insists to-day so obstinately that we don’t know what to say to him.”

“He wants money no doubt for the poor of the commune; take twenty-five louis and give them to him from me.”

“Madame,” said the lady’s maid, returning a moment later, “monsieur le curé refuses to take the money and insists on speaking to you.”

“Let him come then!” replied the marchioness, with an angry gesture which augured ill for the reception of the priest, whose persecution she evidently proposed to put a stop to by a brief and frank explanation.

The marchioness had lost her mother in childhood, and her education naturally felt the influence of the relaxation of religious bonds in France during the Revolution. Piety is a woman’s virtue which only women transmit in full force, and the marchioness was a child of the eighteenth century whose philosophical beliefs were those of her father. She performed no religious duties. To her a priest was a public functionary whose usefulness seemed to her by no means beyond denial. In her present situation the voice of religion could only aggravate her misery. Furthermore she had little faith in village curés or in their

learning; so she determined to put hers in his proper place, without harshness, and to rid herself of him after the fashion of the rich, by a benefaction.

The curé entered, and his aspect did not change the marchioness's ideas. She saw before her a little fat man with a protuberant belly, a rubicund face, but aged and wrinkled, which tried to smile, but smiled wanly. A quarter-circle of his bald pate, crossed by numerous wrinkles, impinged upon his face and contracted it; sparse, white hairs fringed the base of his head above the neck, and came forward toward the ears; nevertheless, it was the face of a man naturally of a blithesome humor. His thick lips, his slightly retroussé nose, his chin, which disappeared in a double fold of wrinkles, bore witness to a cheerful temperament.

At first the marchioness observed only these main features; but at the first word that the priest addressed to her, she was impressed by the sweetness of his voice; she looked at him more closely and saw beneath his grizzly eyebrows eyes that had shed tears; and the contour of his cheek, seen in profile, gave to his head such a majestic expression of sorrow that the marchioness recognized a man in the humble curé.

"Madame la marquise, the rich belong to us only when they suffer; and the sufferings of a married woman, young, lovely, and rich, who has lost neither children nor kindred, are easily guessed and are caused by wounds whose darting pains can be allayed only by religion. Your soul is in danger, madame. I am not referring now to the other life that awaits us. No, I am not in the confessional. But is it not my duty to enlighten you concerning the future of your social life? So you will pardon an old man for an intrusion which has your happiness for its object."

"Happiness is not for me any more, monsieur. I shall soon belong to you, as you say, but forever."

"No, madame, you will not die of the sorrow that afflicts you and is written on your features. If you were destined to die of it, you would not be at Saint-Lange. We die not so much from the effects of regret as from those of disappointed hopes. I have known more unendurable, more terrible sorrows than yours that have not caused death."

The marchioness made a gesture of incredulity.

"I know a man, madame, whose unhappiness was so great that your troubles would seem trivial to you if you should compare them to his."

Whether it was that her long solitude was beginning to be irksome to her, or that she was attracted by the prospect of being able to pour her troubles into a heart well inclined toward grief-stricken thoughts, she looked at the curé with a questioning expression which it was impossible to misunderstand.

"Madame," the priest continued, "that man was a father who had only three children left of a large family. He had lost in succession father and mother, and a daughter and a wife, all dearly loved. He lived in the heart of one of the provinces, on a small estate where he had passed many happy years. His three sons were in the army, and each had reached a rank proportioned to his years of service. During the Hundred Days the oldest was transferred to the Guard, and became a colonel; the second was a major in the artillery, and the youngest a captain of dragoons. Those three boys, madame, loved their father as dearly as he loved them. If you were familiar with the thoughtlessness of young men, who, being carried away by their passions, never have any time

to give to family affection, you would understand from a single fact the warmth of their affection for a poor, lonely old man who lived only in them and through them. Not a week passed that he did not have a letter from one of them. But, you see, he had never been weak with them, which lessens children's respect, nor unjustly harsh, which wounds them, nor sparing of sacrifices, which alienates them. No, he had been more than a father to them — he had made himself their brother, their friend. At last he went to Paris to bid them adieu on starting for Belgium; he wanted to see whether they had good horses, whether there was anything they needed. When they were off, the father returned home. The war begins — he receives letters written from Fleurus, from Ligny; all was going well. The battle of Waterloo was fought — you know the result. All France was put in mourning at a single stroke. Every family was in the most terrible anxiety. He, madame, you understand, he waited; he had neither truce nor rest; he read the papers, he went every day to the post-office himself. One evening he is told that the servant of his son the colonel has arrived; he looks out and sees him riding his son's horse. There were no questions to be asked: the colonel was dead, cut in two by a cannon-ball. Later in the evening the servant of the youngest son arrives on foot; his master had died on the day after the battle. Last of all, at midnight, an artilleryman arrives and informs him of the death of the last of the three, upon whom, even in so short a time, the poor father had placed his whole life. Yes, madame, they had all fallen!"

After a pause, the priest, having conquered his emotion, added these words in a mild voice: —

"And the father lived on, madame. He understood



that if God left him on earth, he must continue to suffer, and he is suffering; but he threw himself upon the bosom of religion. What could he become?"

The marchioness raised her eyes to the curé's face, which was fairly sublime with melancholy resignation, and awaited these words which brought tears to her eyes:—

"A priest, madame; he was consecrated by tears before he was consecrated at the foot of the altar."

For a moment there was silence. The marchioness and the curé looked through the window at the misty horizon, as if they could see there those who were no more.

"Not priest in a city, but a simple village curé," he continued.

"At Saint-Lange?" she asked, wiping her eyes.

"Yes, madame."

Never had sorrow shown itself to Julie in greater majesty and grandeur; and that "Yes, madame," fell upon her heart with the weight of a never-ending grief. That voice, echoing softly in her ear, moved her to the very depths of her being. Ah! that was, in truth, the voice of unhappiness, that full, grave voice which seemed freighted with penetrating fluids.

"Monsieur," said the marchioness, almost with veneration, "if I do not die, what will become of me?"

"Have n't you a child, madame?"

"Yes," she said coldly.

The curé bestowed upon her a glance like that a doctor casts upon a patient who is dangerously ill, and determined to do his utmost to rescue her from the genius of evil that was already putting forth his hand over her.

"You see, madame, we must needs live with our sorrows, and religion alone offers us genuine consolation. Will you permit me to come again and let you hear the

voice of a man who knows how to sympathize with all kinds of trouble, and who is not, I think, a very frightful object?"

"Yes, monsieur, come. I thank you for having thought of me."

"Very well, madame; adieu for a time."

This visit relieved the strain, so to speak, upon the marchioness's mind, whose faculties had been too violently agitated by grief and solitude. The priest left in her heart a balsamic perfume, and the salutary echo of the words of religion. Furthermore, she felt that sort of satisfaction which rejoices the prisoner when, after realizing his utter solitude and the weight of his chains, he makes the acquaintance of a neighbor who knocks on the wall and teaches him to make sounds by which they exchange their thoughts. She had an unhopèd-for confidant. But she soon relapsed into her bitter meditations, and said to herself, as the prisoner does, that a companion in misery would lighten neither her bonds nor her future.

The curé had purposely refrained from giving alarm, at his first visit, to a sorrow that was wholly selfish; but he hoped, by virtue of his art, to be able to clear the way for religion in a second interview. Two days later he called again, and the marchioness's reception of him proved that she had longed for his visit.

"Well, madame la marquise," said the old man, "have you reflected at all upon the great mass of human suffering? have you looked up at the sky? have you seen there that infinite multitude of worlds which, by diminishing our importance, by crushing our vanity, allay our sorrows?"

"No, monsieur," she said. "The laws of society lie too heavy on my heart and rend it too fiercely for me to be able to exalt myself to the skies. But perhaps the

laws are not so cruel as the customs of the world. Oh! the world!"

"We are bound, madame, to obey both alike; the law is the word, and customs are the acts, of society."

"Obey society?" rejoined the marchioness, with a gesture of horror. "Why, monsieur, all our ills come from it. God never made a single law of unhappiness; but, on putting their heads together, men have undone his work. We are, we women, more maltreated by civilization than we should be by nature. Nature imposes upon us physical sufferings which you have not allayed, and civilization has developed sentiments which you never cease to betray. Nature destroys feeble creatures, but you condemn them to live in order to abandon them to endless misery. Marriage, the institution upon which society rests to-day, imposes its whole burden upon us alone: liberty for the man, duty for the woman. We owe our whole lives to you: you owe us only occasional moments of yours. And lastly, the man makes a choice, whereas we just submit blindly. Oh! monsieur, I can speak freely to you; and I say that marriage, as it is practised to-day, seems to me to be simply legalized prostitution. That is the cause of all my sufferings. But I alone among the wretched creatures so fatally yoked, I alone must keep silent! I alone am the author of my own misery, for I insisted on marrying my husband."

She stopped, shed some bitter tears, and said no more for a moment.

"In this utter wretchedness, in this ocean of sorrow," she continued, "I had found a few sandy islets on which I could place my feet, where I could suffer at my ease; a hurricane swept them all away. And here I am, alone, without support, too weak to face the storm."

"We are never weak when God is with us," said the priest. "Moreover, even if you have no affections to gratify here on earth, have you no duties to perform?"

"Duties, always duties!" she exclaimed, with a touch of impatience. "But where, in my case, are the feelings that give us strength to perform them? Monsieur, nothing from nothing or nothing for nothing is one of the justest laws of nature, moral and physical. Would you expect those trees to put forth their leaves without the sap that makes them bud? The heart has its sap as well; in my case the sap has dried up at its source."

"I will say nothing of the religious sentiments that give birth to resignation," said the curé; "but maternity, madame, is not that —"

"Stop, monsieur!" she interposed. "With you I will be perfectly honest. Alas! I cannot be so with anybody else now. I am doomed to play a part; the world demands constant grimacing, and bids us comply with its conventions on pain of obloquy. There are two sorts of maternity, monsieur. Once I knew nothing of such a distinction; to-day, I do know it. I am only half a mother, and it would be better to be none at all. Hélène is not *his*! Oh! do not shudder! Saint-Lange is an abyss in which many false ideas have been engulfed, from which ominous gleams have risen, and into which the fragile structures of laws enacted against nature have crumbled away. I have a child — that is enough; I am a mother — so the law decrees. But you, monsieur, with your tenderly compassionate heart, will perhaps understand the outcries of a poor woman who has allowed no artificial sentiment to make its way into her heart. God will judge me, but I do not think that I disobey his law in yielding to the affection he has implanted in my very being; and this is what I

found there. A child, monsieur, is the image of two persons, is he not? the fruit of two sentiments freely blended? If he is not attached to every fibre of the body as well as to all the affections of the heart; if he does not recall ecstatic passions, the times and places where those two were happy together, and their language overflowing with human music, and their blissful thoughts, that child is an abortive creation. Yes, for them he must be an enrapturing miniature in which the poems of their twofold private life are reproduced; he must afford them an unfailing source of emotions, be to them at once their whole past and their whole future. My poor little Hélène is her father's child, the child of duty and of chance; she finds in me nothing more than the woman-instinct, the law that impels us irresistibly to protect the creature born of our flesh. I am beyond reproach, socially speaking. Have I not sacrificed my life and my happiness to her? Her cries move me to the depths; if she should fall into the water, I should jump in to save her. But she is not in my heart. Oh! love made me dream of a nobler, more complete motherhood; in a dream that has vanished I caressed the child conceived by desire before it was engendered — the lovely flower that is born in the soul before it is born into the light. I am to Hélène what, in the natural order of things, a mother should be to her offspring. When she ceases to need me, that will be the end: the cause having ceased to exist, the effect will cease. If woman has the inestimable privilege of extending her motherhood over her child's whole life, is not that divine persistence of the mother-love to be attributed to the radiant beams of her moral parturition? When the child has not had its mother's soul for its first wrapping, the maternal sentiment ceases in her heart as it does in that of beasts. That this is true,

I know; as my poor child grows, my heart contracts. The sacrifices I have made for her have already alienated me from her, whereas for another child my love would have been inexhaustible, I know; nothing would have been a sacrifice, everything would have been a joy. In this matter, monsieur, argument, religion, everything is powerless against my feelings. Is it wrong for a woman to long for death who is neither wife nor mother, and who, to her misery, has had a glimpse of love in its infinite beauty, of motherhood in its boundless joys? What can she do? I will tell you what she feels! A hundred times during the day, a hundred times during the night, I tremble in every part of my being when some recollection, too feebly resisted, brings back the picture of a happiness which I think of as greater than it was. These heartrending fancies overshadow my feelings, and I say to myself: 'What would my life have been, *if* — ?' "

She hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"That is the very bottom of my heart!" she continued. "A child by him would have made the most ghastly misfortunes bearable to me. The Lord who died burdened with all the sins of the world will forgive me for that thought, which is deadly to me. But the world, I know, is implacable: in its eyes my words are blasphemous; I defy all its laws. Ah! but I would like to make war on this cruel world, to revise its laws and customs, or to crush them! Has it not wounded me in every fibre, in all my ideas, in all my feelings, in all my desires, in all my hopes, in the future, in the present, in the past? To me the day is full of shadows, thought is a sword, my heart is a sore, my child is a negation. Yes, while H  l  ne speaks to me, I wish that she had another voice; when she looks at me, I wish that she had other eyes. She is a living witness of

all that should be and is not. She is intolerable to me! I smile at her, I try to compensate her for the affection I rob her of. I suffer! oh! monsieur, I suffer too much to be able to live. And I shall be looked upon as a virtuous woman! I have committed no sin! And my memory will be honored! I have struggled against the involuntary love to which I was in duty bound not to surrender; but if I have kept my faith physically, have I retained my heart? This," she said, placing her right hand against her breast, "has never belonged to but one human being. And so my child is not mistaken. There are motherly tones of voice, glances, gestures, whose force fashions the souls of children; and my poor little one does not feel my arm quiver, my voice tremble, my eyes grow tender, when I look at her, or speak to her, or take her in my arms. She casts reproachful glances at me which I cannot meet. Sometimes I tremble lest I find in her a tribunal which will condemn me unheard. Heaven grant that hatred may not come between us some day! Almighty God! rather open the door of the tomb to me, and let me end my life at Saint-Lange! I want to go to the world where I shall find my other self, where I shall be a mother in very truth! Oh! forgive me, monsieur, I am mad. Those words were choking me, and I have said them. Ah! you are weeping, too! you will not despise me.—Hélène! Hélène, my child, come here!" she cried with something like despair, as she heard the child returning from her drive.

The little girl came in laughing and crying with glee; she had a butterfly that she had caught; but, seeing her mother in tears, she became silent, stood beside her, and allowed herself to be kissed on the forehead.

"She is very beautiful," said the priest.

"She is her father all over," replied the marchioness,

embracing the child with a show of warmth, as if to pay a debt or to banish remorse.

"You're hot, mamma."

"Go, leave us, my angel," said her mother.

The child went away without regret, without looking at her mother, happy to run away from a sad countenance, and already aware that the sentiments depicted thereon were adverse to her. The smile is the attribute, the tongue the outward expression, of motherhood. The marchioness could not smile. She blushed as she met the priest's eye; she had hoped to show herself a mother, but neither she nor the child had been able to lie. In truth, the kisses of a sincere woman possess a sort of celestial honey which seems to give a soul to the caress, a subtle fire which penetrates the heart. Kisses devoid of that rich savor are dry and acrid.

The priest was conscious of the difference; it enabled him to sound the depth of the abyss between maternity of the flesh and maternity of the heart. And so, after a searching glance at the marchioness, he said to her:—

"You are right, madame; it would be better for you to be dead."

"Ah! you comprehend my suffering, I see," she replied, "since you, a Christian priest, divine and approve the fatal resolution with which it inspired me. Yes, I determined to kill myself; but I lacked the courage necessary to carry out my plan. My body was cowardly when my heart was strong, and when my hand ceased to tremble, then my heart wavered! I do not know the secret of these constant struggles and alternations. Doubtless I am most pitifully feminine, with no persistency in my resolutions, strong only to love. I despise myself! At night, when my people were asleep, I would go bravely enough to the



pond; but when I reached the shore, my feeble nature was horrified at the thought of self-destruction. I confess all my weaknesses to you. When I was in bed again, I was always ashamed of myself and recovered my courage. At one of those times I took laudanum; but I suffered simply, and did n't die. I had intended to drink all there was in the bottle, but I stopped at half."

"You are lost, madame," said the curé gravely, with tears in his voice. "You will go back to the world and deceive the world; you will seek there and you will find what you will regard as a recompense for your wretchedness; and then some day you will pay the penalty of your pleasures."

"What!" she cried; "you think that I would abandon to the first villain who knows how to play the comedy of passion the last and most precious treasures of my heart, and poison my life for a moment of questionable pleasure? No! my soul will be consumed by a spotless flame. All men, monsieur, have the passions of their sex; but the man who has its soul and who thus satisfies all the demands of our nature, whose melodious chords are never stirred except under the pressure of the sentiments, such a man is not met with twice in one short life. My future is ghastly, I know; woman is nothing without love, beauty is nothing without pleasure; but would not the world blame my happiness, if happiness should again be offered me? I owe my daughter an honored mother. I am confined within a circle of fire from which I cannot escape without ignominy. Family duties, performed without compensation, will weary me; I shall curse life, but my daughter will at least have a fair semblance of a mother. I will give her treasures of virtue to take the place of the treasures of affection, of love of which I have defrauded her.

I do not wish to live even to taste the joys which a mother derives from her children's happiness. I do not believe in happiness. What will H  l  ne's lot be? Like mine, no doubt. What means has a mother of assuring her daughter that the man to whom she gives her will be a husband according to her heart? You cry shame at poor creatures who sell themselves for a few francs to a man who passes by: hunger and poverty absolve those ephemeral unions; whereas society tolerates, yes, encourages the immediate union, far more horrible, of an innocent girl and a man whom she never saw till within three months; she is sold for her whole life. It is true that she brings a high price! If only, while allowing her no reward for her sorrows, you honored her; but no — the world slanders the most virtuous of us all! Such is our destiny, viewed in both lights; public prostitution and shame, private prostitution and unhappiness. As for the poor girls without dowries, they go mad and die; for them there is no pity! Beauty and virtue have no value in your human bazaar, and you call that den of selfishness society! In heaven's name, disinherit the women; in that way you will at least obey one law of nature by choosing your mates and marrying them in accordance with the dictates of the heart."

"Your words, madame, convince me that neither the spirit of family, nor religion, has any hold on you. So that you will not hesitate between the social egotism which offends you, and the egotism of the individual which will cause you to crave worldly pleasures."

"Family, monsieur? is there such a thing? I deny the existence of the family in a society which, at the death of father or mother, divides the property and bids each child go his own way. The family is a temporary and fortuitous association which is speedily dissolved by death. Our

laws have broken up families and inheritances, and have destroyed the permanence of examples and traditions. I see nothing but ruins about me."

"Madame, you will return to God only when his hand is laid heavily upon you, and I pray that you may have time enough to make your peace with Him. You seek your consolation by looking down at the ground instead of raising your eyes to Heaven. Philosophy and personal interest have assailed your heart; you are deaf to the voice of religion, like the children of this age of no faith! Worldly pleasures bring naught but suffering in their tracks. You will change one kind of sorrow for another, that is all."

"I shall falsify your prophecy," she said, smiling bitterly; "I shall be true to the man who died for me."

"Sorrow," he replied, "is likely to live only in minds prepared by religion."

He lowered his eyes respectfully in order not to let her see the doubts that his glance might express. The earnestness of the marchioness's lamentations had made him profoundly sad. Recognizing the human *ego* in its myriad shapes, he despaired of touching that heart which unhappiness had withered instead of softening, and in which the seed of the celestial Sower was not likely to germinate, since his gentle voice was drowned by the loud and appalling clamor of selfishness. Nevertheless, he displayed the perseverance of the apostle, and returned several times, always attracted by the hope of turning that proud and noble soul toward God. But he lost courage on the day that he saw that the marchioness liked to talk with him only because she took pleasure in talking of him who was no more. He did not choose to degrade his sacred ministry by making himself the obliging accomplice of a

worldly passion; he ceased his appeals and recurred by degrees to the commonplace formulas of conversation.

The spring arrived. The marchioness found distractions from her profound melancholy, and busied herself with her estate, on which she was pleased to order a number of improvements begun. In October she left her old château of Saint-Lange, where she had become fresh and beautiful once more in the idleness of a sorrow which was as violent at first as a discus hurled with great force, but which finally subsided into placid melancholy, as the discus comes to a standstill after oscillations growing gradually slower and slower. Melancholy consists of a succession of similar moral oscillations, the first of which is nigh to despair, and the last nigh to pleasure; in youth it is the morning twilight, in old age that of the evening.

When her calèche drove through the village, the marchioness was saluted by the curé who was returning from the church to his rectory; but when she answered the salutation she lowered her eyes and turned her head to avoid seeing him again. The priest had prophesied too truly concerning that poor Diana of the Ephesians.

## III.

## AT THIRTY YEARS.

A YOUNG man of the loftiest prospects, who belonged to one of those historic houses whose name, even in despite of the laws, will always be closely interwoven with the glory of France, was present at the ball given by Madame Firmiani. That lady had given him letters of introduction to two or three of her friends at Naples, and M. Charles de Vandenesse — that was the young man's name — had come to thank her and to take leave of her.

Having performed several missions with skill, Vandenesse had recently been attached to one of our ministers plenipotentiary at the Congress of Laybach, and proposed to take advantage of the journey to study Italy. The ball therefore was, as it were, a farewell to the pleasures of Paris, to that whirlpool of ideas and dissipations of which we speak evil often enough, but to which it is so sweet to abandon one's self.

Accustomed for three years past to greet the European capitals and turn his back upon them at the pleasure of the hazards of his diplomatic career, Charles de Vandenesse had little to regret on leaving Paris. Women no longer made any impression on him, whether because he considered that a genuine passion filled too much space in the life of a statesman, or because the paltry concerns of superficial gallantry seemed to him too trivial for a strong character. We all make great pretensions to strength of

mind. In France no man, however mediocre his parts, is content to be reckoned simply clever. And so Charles, although still young, — he was barely thirty, — had already philosophically accustomed himself to see ideas, results, methods, where other men of his years saw sentiments, pleasures, and illusions. He forced back the ardor and enthusiasm natural to young men into the depths of his being, which nature had fashioned in a generous mould. He strove hard to make of himself a cool and calculating individual; to expend in amiable manners and in the wiles of fascination the mental treasures that he owed to chance: the task of one genuinely ambitious; a pitiable rôle undertaken with the object of attaining what we call to-day “a fine position.”

He cast a final glance about the salons where dancing was in progress. He desired, before leaving the ball, to obtain a picture of it to carry with him, just as a spectator does not leave his box at the Opéra without a glance at the final tableau. But, in obedience to a fancy readily understood, M. de Vandenesse studied the thoroughly French scene, the brilliancy and the laughing faces of that Parisian fête, comparing them mentally with the new faces and picturesque scenes that awaited him at Naples, where he proposed to pass a few days before going on to his post. He seemed to be contrasting France, so changing in aspect and so quickly studied, to a country whose manners and landscapes were known to him only from contradictory reports, or from books, in most cases poorly written. Certain reflections not unpoetic but exceedingly commonplace to-day, passed through his mind, and responded, unknown to himself perhaps, to the secret longings of his heart — a heart rather exacting than *blasé*, rather unoccupied than withered.

"Here," he said to himself, "are the most fashionable, the richest, the most aristocratic women in Paris. Here are all the celebrities of the day, — celebrities of politics, aristocratic and literary celebrities; here are artists and men of authority and power. And yet I see naught but petty intrigues, still-born passions, smiles that say nothing, causeless disdain, glances devoid of fire, and plenty of wit, but squandered aimlessly. All these pink and white faces are in search of distraction rather than pleasure. No emotion is genuine. If you want nothing more than gracefully adjusted feathers, fresh muslin gowns, pretty toilets, and frail women; if life to you is simply a surface to breathe upon, here is what you want. Be content with these meaningless phrases, these fascinating grimaces, and do not expect to find sentiment in these hearts. For my part, I have a horror of the vapid intrigues which end in marriages, in sub-prefectures, in collectorships of taxes, or, if it's a matter of love, in secret negotiations, we are so ashamed even of a semblance of passion. I do not see a single one of these eloquent faces which indicates a mind given over to an idea as to remorse. Here, regret or misfortune hide themselves shamefacedly beneath a jest. I can see none of the women here with whom I should care to contend, none of those who drag one into an abyss. Where can one find a touch of energy in Paris? A dagger is a curio which is hung on a gilt nail, and supplied with a dainty sheath. Women, ideas, sentiments, all resemble one another. There are no such things as passions nowadays, because individuality is a thing of the past. Rank, fortune, intellect have been reduced to a common level, and we have all donned the black coat as if in mourning for dead and gone France. We do not like our equals. Between two lovers there should be differences to wipe out,

spaces to be filled. That charming feature of love vanished in 1789! Our ennui, our insipid manners, are the result of our political system. In Italy lines are sharply drawn, at all events. There women are still maleficent animals, dangerous sirens, devoid of sense and of any other logic than that of their inclinations and their appetites; and to be distrusted as you distrust a tiger —”

Madame Firmiani interrupted this monologue, whose contradictory, unfinished, confused thoughts are not capable of reproduction. The merit of a reverie lies entirely in its vagueness; it is a sort of intellectual vapor.

“I want,” she said, taking his arm, “to introduce you to a woman who is most anxious to know you after what she has heard about you.”

She led him into an adjoining salon and pointed out to him by a gesture, a smile, and a glance of the true Parisian stamp, a woman seated by the fireplace.

“Who is she?” inquired the Comte de Vandenesse eagerly.

“A woman whom you have certainly talked about more than once, either to praise or to blame her; a woman who lives in solitude — a genuine mystery.”

“If you were ever kind in your life, for heaven’s sake tell me her name!”

“The Marquise d’Aiglemont.”

“I am going to take lessons of her; she has succeeded in transforming a very mediocre husband into a peer of France, an absolute nullity into a capable politician. But tell me, do you think Lord Grenville died for her sake, as some women have declared?”

“It may be so. Since that episode, false or true, the poor woman has changed sadly. She has n’t been into society yet. Constancy of four years’ duration is



something noteworthy in Paris. If you see her here —” Madame Firmiani checked herself; then added, with a sly expression, “I forgot that I must n’t say anything. Go and talk with her.”

Charles stood for a moment, leaning lightly against the door-jamb, intently scrutinizing a woman who had become famous without anybody’s understanding upon what basis her fame rested. The world offers many such curious anomalies. Surely Madame d’Aiglemont’s reputation was no more extraordinary than that of certain men who are always toiling at some unnamed work; statisticians deemed most learned on the faith of tables which they know better than to publish; politicians who live on a single newspaper article; authors or artists whose work never leaves their portfolios; scientists who are very learned with those who know nothing of science, as Sganarelle is a latinist with those who do not know Latin; men to whom is conceded a certain capacity in one direction, whether it be in matters of art, or in accomplishing an important mission. That admirable phrase, “It’s his specialty,” seems to have been invented for these political or literary acephali.

Charles stood gazing at her longer than he intended, and was annoyed to find himself so powerfully interested by a woman; but that woman’s presence contradicted the ideas that the young diplomatist had formed a moment before while watching the ball.

The marchioness, at this time thirty years of age, was beautiful, although very thin and excessively delicate. Her greatest charm was derived from her face, whose tranquillity denoted an amazing depth of soul. Her eye, as brilliant as ever, but veiled as it were by a constant preoccupation, indicated a feverish life and the most

far-reaching resignation. Her eyelids were almost always modestly lowered. If she chanced to look about her, it was with a melancholy movement of the eyes, and you would have said that she reserved their fire for gazing at occult things. So that every man of superior mind felt curiously drawn toward that gentle and silent woman. If the mind sought to fathom the mysteries of her perpetual reaction from the present to the past, from the world to her solitude, the spirit was no less interested in becoming acquainted with the secrets of a heart that seemed in some sense proud of its sufferings.

Moreover, there was nothing about her that contradicted the ideas that she suggested at first. Like almost all women who have very long hair, she was perfectly white. Her skin, which was wonderfully fine, — a sign that rarely deceives, — indicated true sensibility, confirmed by the character of her features, which had the marvellous “finish” that the Chinese painters give to their imaginary figures. Her neck was slightly long perhaps; but that sort of neck is the most graceful, and gives to a woman’s head a vague affinity with the magnetic undulations of the serpent. Although there should not be present a single one of the thousand and one signs by which even the most sedulously concealed characters are revealed to the observer, it would be enough to examine closely the movements of the head and the contortions of the neck, so varied and expressive they are, to form a judgment of a woman.

In Madame d’Aiglemont, the outward guise was in harmony with the thought that ruled her being. The broad plaits of her hair formed on top of her head a high crown, in which she wore no ornament, for she seemed to have said adieu forever to the niceties of the toilet. So that

one never detected in her those petty wiles of coquetry which spoil many women. But, modest as her corsage always was, it did not entirely conceal the elegance of her figure. The beauty of her long dress consisted in its extreme distinction of style; and if one may seek ideas in the arrangement of a fabric, it may be said that the numerous plain folds of her gown imparted to it a wondrous nobility.

Nevertheless, it may be that she betrayed the ineradicable foibles of her sex by the meticulous care that she took of her hands and feet; but, if she did like to show them, it would have been difficult for the most malicious rival to call her movements affected, they always appeared so unconscious, or due to the remembered habit of childhood. Moreover, this remnant of coquetry won forgiveness by virtue of her graceful ease of manner.

The ensemble of trifles which make a woman ugly or pretty, attractive or repellent, can only be indicated, especially when, as in Madame d'Aiglemont, the mind is the connecting bond between all the details and imparts to them a fascinating unity. Thus her bearing was in perfect harmony with the character of her face and her dress. Only when they reach a certain age do some women acquire the art of making their attitude speak for them. Is it disappointment, or is it happiness, that makes known to a woman of thirty, happy or unhappy, the secret of that eloquent bearing? That will always be an enigma which every one will solve according to his desires, his hopes, or his theory. The way in which the marchioness rested her elbows on the arms of her chair, and placed the fingertips of one hand against those of the other, as if in play; the curve of her neck, the *laisser-aller* of her languid but supple frame, which lay back in the chair in a graceful

attitude of prostration, the careless pose of her limbs, her movements instinct with lassitude — all revealed a woman without interest in life, who has never known the joys of love, but has dreamed of them, and who is bent beneath the burdens with which her memory overwhelms her; a woman who long ago despaired of the future and of herself; a woman without occupation, who mistakes emptiness of life for total annihilation.

Charles de Vandenesse gazed in admiration at that superb picture, but looked upon it as the product of a “knack” more skilful than that of ordinary women. He knew M. d’Aiglemont. At the first glance he cast at his wife, whom he had never before seen, the young diplomatist detected dissimilarities, incompatibilities (let us use the legal term) between them, so great that it was impossible that the marchioness should love her husband. However, Madame d’Aiglemont’s life was beyond reproach, and her virtue gave an even greater value to all the mysteries that an observer might foresee in her.

When his first feeling of surprise had passed away, Vandenesse reflected upon the best way of approaching Madame d’Aiglemont, and, resorting to a not uncommon diplomatic ruse, he determined to subject her to a little embarrassment in order to see how she would receive a foolish performance on his part.

“Madame,” he said, seating himself by her side, “I have just learned, through a lucky indiscretion, that I have, on what ground I know not, the good fortune to be distinguished by you. I am the more grateful to you because I have never before been the recipient of a similar favor. So that you will be responsible for one of my faults hereafter, for I shall never be modest again.”

“You will make a mistake, monsieur,” she replied

with a laugh; "you should leave vanity to those who have nothing else to put forward."

Thereupon the marchioness and the young man fell into conversation, and, according to custom, touched upon a multitude of subjects: painting, music, literature, politics, men, events, and things. And finally, by insensible steps, they arrived at the never-failing subjects of confidential talks, in France and everywhere else — love, sentiment, and women.

"We are slaves."

"You are queens."

The remarks, more or less clever, made by Charles and his companion might be reduced to that simple essence of all discourses upon those subjects, present and future. Do not those two sentences all mean at a certain time, — "Love me" — "I will love you"?

"Madame," said Charles softly, "you make me bitterly regret leaving Paris. I shall certainly have no such intellectual hours as this in Italy."

"You will find happiness there, perhaps, monsieur, and that is worth more than all the brilliant thoughts, true or false, that are put into words in Paris every evening."

Before bidding the marchioness good-night, Charles obtained permission to call and say adieu to her. He deemed himself very fortunate to have imparted to his request the accent of sincerity, when he found on going to bed that night, and throughout the whole of the next day, that he could not drive the thought of her from his mind. Sometimes he wondered why she had distinguished him, what her purpose could have been in desiring to see him; and he made endless conjectures. Sometimes he fancied that he could divine the reason of her curiosity; thereupon he became drunk with hope, or turned cold,

according to the interpretation he gave to that courteous wish, so common in Paris. Sometimes it was everything, sometimes it was nothing. Finally, he determined to resist the impulse that drew him toward Madame d'Aiglemont; but he went to her house.

There are thoughts that we obey without being conscious of them; they are in our mind without our knowledge. Although this reflection may seem rather paradoxical than well-founded, every straightforward person will find innumerable proofs of it in his own life. In going to call on the marchioness Charles obeyed one of those preëxisting thoughts of which our experience and the victories of our mind are only the visible developments. A woman of thirty has an irresistible attraction for a young man; nothing is more natural, more strongly knit, or more surely fore-ordained, than the deep-seated attachments, of which we see so many in the world, between a woman like the marchioness and a young man like Vandenesse.

The fact is that a young girl has too many illusions, too little experience, and sex counts for too much in her love, for a young man to be flattered by it; whereas a woman knows the full measure of the sacrifices she must make. Where the one is led on by a curiosity, by fascinations quite different from those of love, the other obeys a conscious sentiment. One yields, the other chooses. And is not that choice in itself extraordinarily flattering? Armed with a knowledge for which she has almost always paid dear, the experienced woman seems, in giving herself, to give more than herself; whereas the girl, ignorant and credulous, having no knowledge at all, can make no comparisons, can form no just estimate of anything; she accepts love and studies it. The one instructs and advises us at an age when we love to allow ourselves to be guided,

when obedience is a pleasure; the other wants to learn everything, and is simply naïve where the first is affectionate. The one affords you but a single triumph, the other obliges you to wage perpetual battles. The one has naught but tears and brief pleasures; the other has ecstatic joys and remorse. For a young girl to be the true mistress, she must be too corrupt, whereupon one abandons her with disgust; whereas a woman has a thousand ways of retaining both her power and her dignity. The one, too submissive, offers you the depressing security of repose; the other loses too much not to seek in love its innumerable metamorphoses. The one dishonors herself alone, the other murders a whole family in your favor. The young girl has naught but one kind of coquetry, and thinks that she has said everything when she has laid aside her clothing; but the woman has countless kinds and conceals herself beneath countless veils; in fine, she flatters your vanity at every point, the other at but one. Moreover, there is a tempest of hesitations, of terrors, of alarms, of perturbations in the woman of thirty, which is never met with in the love of a young girl. Having reached that age, a woman looks to a young man to restore to her the esteem that she has sacrificed to him: she lives only for him, thinks about his future, wishes his life to be happy, and seeks to make it glorious; she obeys, she begs and commands, debases and exalts herself, and is able to find consolation on numberless occasions when the young girl can only groan and lament.

Lastly, in addition to all the advantages of her position, the woman of thirty can make herself into a girl, can play all parts, be modest, and even turn a mishap into an embellishment. Between them lies the immeasurable distance that separates the expected from the unexpected,

strength from weakness. The woman of thirty satisfies every wish, and the young girl is destined to satisfy none, or else to be no longer a young girl. These ideas take form in a young man's heart and result in the most violent of passions, for it unites the artificial sentiments created by our manners with the genuine sentiments of nature.

The most momentous and most decisive step in a woman's life is just the one that the woman herself looks upon as most meaningless. Married, she no longer belongs to herself, she is the queen and the slave of the family fireside. The sanctity of woman is irreconcilable with the duties and liberties of the world. To emancipate women is to corrupt them. By granting to a stranger the right to enter into the sanctuary of the home, do we not place ourselves at his mercy? but let a wife lure him thither, and it is — is it not? — a sin, or, to be precise, the beginning of a sin. We must either accept this theory in its uttermost results, or else absolve the passions. Hitherto, in France, society has succeeded in taking a *mezzo termine*: it makes sport of unhappy passions. Like the Spartans who punished only lack of adroitness, it seems to connive at theft. But it may be that this system is very wise. General contempt is the most horrible of all punishments, in that it wounds a woman to the heart. Women set much store, and justly, upon being held in honor, for without esteem they do not really live; so that that is the first sentiment they demand of love. The most corrupt of women insists, before everything else, upon absolution for the past, while selling her future, and tries to make her lover understand that she is giving the honor that the world will thenceforth deny her in exchange for irresistible bliss.

There is no woman who, on receiving a young man in her house for the first time, and being left alone with him,



does not conceive some such thoughts as these; especially if he is, like Charles de Vandenesse, both comely and clever. In like manner, few young men fail to base some secret longings upon one of the thousand ideas which justify their innate love for beautiful, intellectual, and unhappy women like Madame d'Aiglemont.

And so the marchioness, when M. de Vandenesse was announced, was perturbed; and he himself was almost abashed, despite the self-assurance which is a part of the diplomatic costume, so to speak. But she speedily assumed the cordiality of manner behind which women are wont to shelter themselves against the misconstruction of vanity. That manner excluded the possibility of any *arrière-pensée*, and assigned to sentiment its proper rôle, as it were, moderating it by the forms of courtesy. Women retain this equivocal position as long as they choose, as if they stood at a cross-roads, whence roads lead to respect, indifference, amazement, or passion.

Not until she is thirty does a woman realize the possibilities of that position. She can laugh, jest, or give way to emotion, without compromising herself. She has the necessary tact to touch all the sensitive chords in a man, and to study the notes that she gets from them. Her silence is as dangerous as her speech. You can never tell, at that age, whether she is sincere or false, whether she is laughing in her sleeve or is honest in her avowals. After giving you the right to contend with her, suddenly, with a word, with a glance, with one of those gestures of whose power she is well aware, she puts an end to the battle, deserts you, and remains possessed of your secret, at liberty to transfix you with a jest, to devote herself to annoying you, being protected alike by her own weakness and by your strength.

Although during this first visit the marchioness took her stand upon that neutral ground, she preserved a lofty womanly dignity. Her secret sorrows were always hovering over her artificial cheerfulness, like a light cloud which partially conceals the sun. Vandenesse took his leave, having tasted, in that conversation, a pleasure he had never known; but he was convinced that the marchioness was one of those women whose conquest costs too dear for one to venture to fall in love with them.

"It would be," he said to himself as he went away, "sentiment forever and ever, and a correspondence to tire out an ambitious chargé d'affaires! And yet, if I chose —"

Those fatal words — "If I chose!" — have often been the ruin of obstinate folk. In France self-esteem leads to passion. Charles called again upon Madame d'Aiglemont, and fancied that he could see that she enjoyed talking with him. Instead of abandoning himself ingenuously to the joy of loving, he decided to play a double part. He tried to appear passionate, and at the same time to analyze in cold blood the progress of the intrigue — to be lover and diplomat. But he was young and warm-hearted, and that process was certain to lead him on to a love without bounds; for, whether artificial or natural, the marchioness was always stronger than he. Whenever he left her house, he clung to his distrust and subjected the successive stages through which his heart was passing to a severe analysis which killed his own emotions.

"To-day," he said to himself after his third call, "she gave me to understand that she was entirely alone in life and very unhappy, and that, if it were n't for her daughter, she would ardently long for death. She seemed perfectly resigned. Now, I am neither her brother nor her

confessor, and why did she confide her sorrows to me? She loves me."

Two days later, as he went away, he apostrophized modern manners:—

"Love takes the tone of each epoch. In 1822 it is doctrinaire. Instead of manifesting itself, as it used, by acts, people discuss it, argue about it, put it in speeches from the platform. Women are reduced to three methods: at first they express a doubt of our passion, and deny us the capacity to love as well as they do. Rank coquetry! a genuine challenge that the marchioness hurled at me to-night. Then they make themselves out terribly unhappy, in order to arouse our natural generosity or our self-esteem. How can a young man fail to be flattered when he is allowed to offer consolation for a great misfortune? Lastly, they have a mania for virginity! She must have thought that I believed her to be a perfect novice. My sincerity may be an excellent speculation."

But one day, having exhausted all his distrustful fancies, he asked himself whether the marchioness was not sincere. If so much wretchedness could be assumed, why should she feign resignation? She lived in complete solitude, and devoured in silence sorrows which she barely allowed one to suspect by the more or less restrained accent of an occasional exclamation. From that moment Charles took a lively interest in Madame d'Aiglemont. And yet, on going to a rendezvous which had become necessary to them both, — an hour reserved by a shared instinct, — he still deemed his mistress more adroit than true, and his last thought was: "Beyond question she is a very clever woman."

He entered the room, and saw the marchioness in her favorite attitude, an attitude instinct with melancholy.

She raised her eyes to his without moving, and bestowed upon him one of those glances full of meaning which resemble a smile. It expressed confidence, true friendship, but not love.

Charles seated himself and could not speak. He was seized by one of those sensations in which language fails.

"What is the matter?" she asked in her tremulous voice.

"Nothing. — Yes," he added, "I am thinking of something to which you have never yet given a thought."

"What is it?"

"Why — the congress is at an end."

"Ah!" she said, "were you to have gone to the congress?"

A direct reply would have been the most eloquent and most delicate of declarations; but Charles did not make it. Madame d'Aiglemont's manner manifested a sincerity of friendship which destroyed all the schemings of vanity, all the hopes of love, all the suspicions of the diplomat. She was, or seemed to be, completely unaware that she was loved; and when Charles, in confusion, was thrown back upon himself, he was forced to confess to himself that he had neither said nor done anything to justify her in thinking it. M. de Vandenesse found the marchioness that evening just what she always had been; simple and cordial, genuine in her sorrow, happy to have a friend, proud to have fallen in with a mind which could understand her own; she did not go beyond that, and did not believe that a woman could allow herself to be seduced twice; but she had known love, and it still lay bleeding in the depths of her heart. She had no idea that happiness could bestow its intoxicating joys upon a woman twice, for she believed, not in the mind alone, but in the soul; and

in her view, love was not a single form of seduction, but included all noble forms thereof. At that moment Charles became a young man again; he was overcome by the splendor of so grand a character, and longed to be admitted to the secrets of that life, blasted by chance rather than by misconduct.

Madame d'Aiglemont cast but one glance at her friend when he asked her to explain the overplus of grief that imparted to her beauty all the distinctive charm of melancholy; but that searching glance was like the seal of a solemn compact.

"Don't ask me any more of such questions," she said. "Four years ago, on a day like this, the man who loved me, the only man to whose happiness I would have sacrificed even my own esteem, died, and died to save my honor. That love came to an end when it was young and pure and full of illusions. Before abandoning myself to a passion toward which an unprecedented fatality drove me on, I had been fascinated by what ruins so many girls, by a man of no character, but of attractive exterior. Marriage stripped me of my hopes, one by one. To-day, I have lost both lawful happiness and the happiness which is called criminal, and have never known real happiness at all. I have nothing left. If I have not found a way to die, I must at least be loyal to my memories."

In saying this she did not weep, but lowered her hands and twisted her fingers a little, having them clasped as she often did. It was said without affectation, but the accent of her voice was the accent of a despair as profound as her love seemed to have been, and left Charles no hope. That ghastly existence, condensed into three or four sentences and emphasized by a twisting of the hands; that violent sorrow in a woman; that aching void in a

lovely head; in fine, the melancholy and the tears of a mourning of four years' duration, fascinated Vandenesse, who sat silent and abashed before that great-souled and noble woman; he no longer saw her physical charms, exquisite and perfect as they were, but her wondrously sensitive soul. He had found at last that ideal being, so unreasoningly dreamed of, so vigorously appealed to by all those who put their whole life into a passion, seek it ardently, and often die without enjoying any of those dream-born treasures.

Listening to that language, and gazing upon that sublime beauty, Charles found his own ideas sadly narrow. In his powerlessness to adapt his own words to the level of that scene, at once so simple and so lofty, he replied by a commonplace remark concerning the lot of woman.

"Madame, one must learn to forget one's sorrow, or else dig one's own grave."

But common sense always seems paltry stuff beside sentiment; the one is naturally limited, like everything positive, the other is infinite. To reason when one should *feel* is the peculiarity of narrow minds. So Vandenesse kept silent, gazed long at Madame d'Aiglemont, and left her.

Possessed by a new order of ideas, which aggrandized woman in his eyes, he resembled a painter who, after taking for types the commonplace models of his studio, should suddenly fall in with the Mnemosyne at the Museum, the most beautiful and least appreciated of ancient statues. Charles was deeply in love. He loved Madame d'Aiglemont with the fervent sincerity of youth, with the intensity which imparts to first passions an indescribable charm, an innocence of which a man finds only the ruins when, later, he falls in love again: blissful passions,

almost always blissfully enjoyed by the woman who gave birth to them; because at that charming age of thirty, the poetic zenith of a woman's life, she can view its whole course, and look back into the past as well as into the future. At that time women realize all the value of love, and enjoy it in the dread of losing it: then their souls are still beautiful with the youth that is beginning to turn its back on them, and their passion constantly acquires new force from their terror of the future.

"I am in love," said Vandenesse to himself this time as he left the marchioness, "and, for my misery, I have found a woman who clings to memories of the past. It's hard to fight against a dead man, who is n't on the spot, who can't make a fool of himself, who never offends, and of whom she sees only the attractive qualities. What is it but attempting to dethrone perfection, to kill the joys of memory and the hopes that survive a dead and gone lover, for the very reason that he has aroused nothing but desires, which are all that love has that is beautiful and seductive?"

This gloomy reflection, due to the discouragement and the fear of failure, by which all true passions begin, was the last device of his expiring diplomacy. Thenceforth he had no mental reservations, but became the plaything of his love and lost himself in the trivialities of that inexplicable happiness which feeds upon a word, a silence, a vague hope. He determined to love platonically; he went every day to breathe the air that Madame d'Aiglemont breathed, almost became a fixture in her house, and attended her everywhere, with the tyranny of a passion that combines its own selfishness with the most absolute devotion.

Love has an instinct of its own; it can find its way to

the heart as the tiniest insect flies to its flower with an irresistible purpose which is daunted by nothing. So that when a sentiment is genuine, its fate is not doubtful. Is it not enough to throw a woman into all the agony of terror, if it occurs to her that her life depends on the amount of truth, of strength, of persistence that her lover puts into his desires? Now, it is impossible for a woman, a wife, a mother, to protect herself against a young man's love; the only thing in her power is to cease to see him the instant that she divines that secret of the heart which a woman always divines. But that course seems too decisive for a woman to adopt it at an age when marriage has become a bore and a burden to her, when conjugal affection is less than lukewarm, if indeed her husband has not already abandoned her. If they are ugly, women are flattered by a love that makes them fair; if young and charming, the fascination must reach the plane of their fascinations — it is immense; if virtuous, a sublime earthly sentiment inclines them to find some sort of absolution in the very grandeur of the sacrifices they make for their lover, and of the glory in that difficult contest. Everything is a snare. So that no lesson is too severe for such strong temptations. The seclusion formerly imposed upon women in Greece and in the Orient, and which is becoming fashionable in England, is the only safeguard of domestic morality; but, under the domination of that system, the attractions of the world vanish; neither society, nor courtesy, nor refinement of manners is possible. The nations will have to choose.

Thus it fell out that, within a few months of her first meeting with Vandenesse, Madame d'Aiglemont found that her life was very closely connected with that young man's; she surprised herself, without embarrassment and even



with a certain pleasure, sharing his tastes and his thoughts. Had she adopted his ideas, or had he espoused her lightest caprices? She did not examine the question. Already seized by the swift current of passion, that adorable creature said to herself with the mistaken sincerity of fear:—

“Oh, no! I will be true to the man who died for me!”

Pascal said: “To doubt God is to believe in him.” In like manner a woman does not struggle until she is caught. On the day when the marchioness admitted to herself that she was loved, she found herself wavering between a thousand contradictory feelings. The superstitions born of experience spoke their language. Would she be happy? Could she find happiness outside the laws upon which society, rightly or wrongly, bases its moral system? Up to that time life had poured naught but bitterness into her cup. Is it possible that there should be a happy dénouement to the bond that unites two persons who are separated by the conventions of society? But, on the other hand, is happiness ever bought at too high a price? And that happiness so ardently craved, and which it is so natural to seek — perhaps she should obtain it at last! Curiosity always pleads the cause of lovers.

In the midst of this inward argument Vandenesse arrived. His presence put to flight the metaphysical phantom of logic. If such are the successive transformations through which a sentiment passes in a young man and a woman of thirty, there comes a moment when the different *nuances* blend, when the arguments unite in a single one, in a final reflection which becomes confounded with a desire and gives emphasis to it. The longer the resistance has been, the more convincing at that moment is the voice of love.

Here then this lesson comes to an end, or rather, this study of the *écorché*,<sup>1</sup> if we may borrow from painting one of its most picturesque expressions; for this tale explains the perils of love rather than describes them. But from that day, each succeeding day added new colors to that skeleton, clothed it with the charms of youth, revived its flesh and its movements, restored to it the beauty, the fascinations of sentiment, and the attractions of life.

Charles found Madame d'Aiglemont lost in thought; and when he asked her in the tone which the sweet sorcery of the heart made persuasive: "What is the matter?" she was careful not to reply. That gratifying question indicated a perfect understanding between their minds; and with the marvellous instinct of woman, the marchioness realized that lamentations, or any outpouring of her secret unhappiness would be, in some degree, advances on her part. If each of those words had a meaning understood by them both, into what an abyss was she about to step! She read her own heart with a clear and far-seeing glance, and held her peace; and her silence was imitated by Vandenesse.

"I am not well," she said at last, terrified by the vast import of a moment when the language of the eyes completely atoned for the impotence of speech.

"Madame," Charles replied in an affectionate tone, but intensely moved in body and soul, "everything is connected. If you were happy, you would be young and fresh. Why should you refuse to ask of love all that love has deprived you of? You think that life is at an end, when, for you, it is just beginning? Trust yourself to the devotion of a friend. It is so sweet to be loved!"

"I am already old," she said, "so that I should have no

<sup>1</sup> That is, a subject from which the skin has been removed.

excuse for not continuing to suffer as in the past. And I ought to love, you say? But I neither ought nor can. Besides yourself, whose friendship gives some charm to my life, no one attracts me, no one could ever banish my memories. I accept a friend, I should fly from a lover. Moreover, would it be generous in me to give a withered heart in exchange for a youthful heart, to accept illusions which I cannot share, to invite a happiness in which I should not believe, or which I should dread to lose? Perhaps I should respond to its devotion by selfishness, and should scheme when it was moved by sentiment; my memory would wound the vivacity of its joys. No, a first lover, you see, can never be replaced. Indeed, what man would want my heart at that price?"

These words, instinct with a ghastly sort of coquetry, were the last struggle of virtue.

"If he becomes discouraged, why, I will remain alone and faithful." This thought passed through her mind, and was to her like the too fragile branch that the drowning man grasps before he is swept away by the current.

When he heard this decree, Vandenesse gave an involuntary shudder, which had a more powerful effect on the marchioness's heart than all his past assiduities had had. Is it not true that what touches a woman most keenly is to find in us a delicacy of feeling as grateful and exquisite as her own? for in woman grace and delicacy are indications of the *true*. Charles's involuntary movement disclosed a genuine passion. Madame d'Aiglemont realized its strength by the strength of her own distress.

"Perhaps you are right," said he coldly. "New love, new grief."

Then he changed the subject and talked of indifferent things; but he was visibly moved; he watched Madame

d'Aiglemont with concentrated attention, as if he had never seen her before. At last he left her, saying with profound emotion:—

“Adieu, madame.”

“Au revoir,” she replied, with the refined coquetry of which only the elect few among women possess the secret.

He made no reply and went away.

When Charles was no longer there, when his empty chair pleaded for him, she had a multitude of regrets, and blamed herself. Passion makes tremendous progress in a woman the moment that she believes herself to have acted ungenerously or to have wounded a noble heart. We must never be suspicious of evil sentiments in love; they are most salutary; women do not succumb except under the influence of virtue. “Hell is paved with good intentions” is not a preacher’s paradox.

Vandenesse did not come again for several days. Every evening, at the usual time, the marchioness awaited him with remorseful impatience. To write would be an avowal; moreover, her instinct told her that he would come. On the sixth day, her footman announced him. Never had she heard his name with greater pleasure. Her joy fairly frightened her.

“You have punished me severely!” she said.

Vandenesse looked at her with a stupefied expression.

“Punished you! For what, pray?”

He understood her well enough; but he determined to have his revenge for the torments he had been through, the moment that she suspected them.

“Why have n’t you been to see me?” she asked with a smile.

“Have n’t you seen anybody?” he said, to avoid a direct reply.

"Monsieur de Ronquerolles and Monsieur de Marsay, and little d'Esgrignon have been here, the first two yesterday, the other this afternoon, about two o'clock. I have seen Madame de Firmiani, too, I believe, and your sister, Madame de Listomère."

More torture! Suffering incomprehensible to those who do not love with that all-pervading and savage despotism whose slightest result is an unnatural jealousy, a never-ending desire to remove the loved one from every influence foreign to love.

"What!" said Vandenesse to himself, "she has received, she has seen and talked with people who are satisfied with life, while I stayed by myself, miserable wretch that I am!"

He swallowed his chagrin, and threw love back into the depths of his heart, as one throws a coffin into the sea. His thoughts were of the sort that one does not express; they have the swift action of those acids which kill in evaporating. But his brow was clouded and Madame d'Aiglemont obeyed her womanly instinct by sharing his melancholy without comprehending it. She was not privy to the pain she was causing, and Vandenesse saw it. He spoke of his situation and his jealousy, as if they were one of the hypotheses that lovers take pleasure in arguing. The marchioness understood it all, and was deeply touched that she could not keep back her tears.

From that moment they entered the paradise of love. Heaven and hell are two great poems which represent the only two points upon which our existence turns: joy and sorrow. Is not heaven, will it not always be, an image of the infinitude of our sentiments which will never be described except in its details because happiness is all of

a piece? And does not hell represent the endless torture of our sorrows, of which we can make a work of poesy, because they are all dissimilar?

One evening the lovers were alone, seated side by side, in silence, absorbed in contemplation of one of the most beautiful phases of the heavens — one of those cloudless skies to which the last rays of the setting sun give a faint tinge of gold and purple. At that moment the gradual fading of the light seems to arouse gentle feelings; our passions stir us mildly, and we relish the perturbation of an indefinable turmoil amid the tranquillity about us. While pointing the way to happiness by vague images, Nature invites us to enjoy it when it is at hand, or causes us to regret it when it has fled. In such moments, fruitful in enchantment, beneath the canopy of that light whose soft harmonies combine with intimate seductions, it is hard to resist the longings of the heart, which then exert such magical power! Then grief loses its keenness, joy intoxicates, and sorrow overwhelms. The beauty of the evening gives the signal for avowals and encourages them. Silence becomes more dangerous than speech, by imparting to the eyes all the power of the boundless expanse of the heavens which they reflect. If one speaks, the slightest word possesses an irresistible power. There is light in the voice, gorgeous color in the glance. It is as if the heavens were in us, or else it seems as if we were in heaven.

And yet Vandenesse and Julie — for she had allowed him, for a few days past, to call her familiarly by that name, even as she delighted to call him Charles — Vandenesse and Julie were talking, but the original subject of their conversation was far behind them; and, even if they no longer knew the meaning of their words, they

listened with rapture to the secret thoughts they concealed. Julie's hand was in his, and she abandoned it to him without thinking of it as a favor.

They leaned forward together to look at one of the majestic landscapes, of snow, and glaciers, and gray shadows which streak the sides of fantastically shaped mountains; one of those pictures made up of sharp contrasts between the red flames and the black bands that adorn the sky with an inimitable and fleeting poesy: magnificent swaddling clothes in which the sun is born, — sublime shroud in which it expires.

At that movement Julie's hair touched Vandenesse's cheek; she felt the light contact and shuddered violently — he even more violently; for they had both arrived by slow degrees at one of those inexplicable crises when tranquillity imparts to the senses a power of perception so keen that the faintest shock brings tears to the eyes, and causes one's sadness to overflow if the heart is sunk in sadness; or gives it ineffable joy if it is lost in the vertigo of love.

Julie pressed her friend's hand almost involuntarily. That persuasive pressure inspired the lover's timidity with courage. The bliss of that moment and the hopes of the future, all blended in one emotion — the emotion of the first caress, of the chaste and modest kiss which Madame d'Aiglemont allowed to be deposited on her cheek. The slighter the favor, the more potent and dangerous it was. Unfortunately for both, there was in it neither pretence nor falsity. It was the reciprocal agreement of two noble hearts, separated by all that the law ordains, united by all the seduction that nature puts forth.

At this juncture General d'Aiglemont entered the room.

"The ministry is changed," he said. "Your uncle is included in the new cabinet. So you have an excellent prospect of an embassy, Vandenesse."

Charles and Julie looked at each other, blushing. That mutual shame was still another bond. They both had the same thought, the same remorse; a terrible bond, and equally strong between two brigands who have just murdered a man and between two lovers who are guilty of a kiss.

It was necessary to answer the general.

"I am no longer anxious to leave Paris," said Vandenesse.

"We know why," said the general, affecting the crafty air of a man who has discovered a secret. "You don't mean to leave your uncle, so that you may obtain the succession to his peerage."

The marchioness fled to her chamber, making to herself this appalling comment upon her husband: —

"Upon my word, he's too stupid!"



## IV.

## THE FINGER OF GOD.

BETWEEN the Barrière de l'Italie and the Barrière de la Santé, on the interior boulevard leading to the Jardin des Plantes, there is a view well adapted to arouse the enthusiasm of the artist or traveller most *blasé* to the pleasures of the eye. Upon attaining a slight eminence, whence the boulevard, shaded by tall, densely foliaged trees, curves as gracefully as a silent, grass-grown forest path, you see before you, at your very feet, a deep valley, peopled by factories that are half villages in themselves, with occasional patches of verdure, and watered by the dark streams of the Bièvre or the Gobelins. On the opposite slope some thousands of roofs, huddled together like the heads of a crowd, conceal the poverty of Faubourg Saint-Marceau. The superb cupola of the Panthéon, the dismal, melancholy dome of the Val-de-Grace, look proudly down upon a whole city in the shape of an amphitheatre, the benches being curiously represented by a number of crooked streets. From that point the proportions of the two monuments seem gigantic; they crush the tallest poplars of the valley as well as the flimsy houses.

At the left the Observatoire, through whose windows and galleries the light produces extraordinarily fantastic effects, stands like a black and fleshless spectre. And in the distance the graceful lantern of the Invalides gleams between the bluish masses of the Luxembourg and the

gray towers of Saint-Sulpice. Viewed from that point, the architectural lines are blended with foliage and shadows, subject to the caprices of a sky whose color and appearance are constantly changing. At a distance, the great structures seem to fill the air; all about are swaying tree-tops and country paths.

On the right, through a broad vista in this strange landscape, you espy the long white sheet of Canal Saint-Martin, lined with reddish stone, bordered by lindens and by the genuinely Roman structures of the storehouses for grain. And in the farthest distance the mist-wreathed hills of Belleville, covered with houses and mills, blend their irregularities with those of the clouds.

But there is a city, which you do not see, between the rows of roofs that border the valley and that far-off horizon, vague as a memory of childhood: an immense city, lost as in a ravine, between the peaks of the hospital of La Pitié and the summit of the cemetery of the East, — between suffering and death. It gives forth a dull muttering like that of the ocean roaring behind a reef, as if to say, "I am here." If the sun casts its floods of light upon that side of Paris, if it purifies and softens its lines, if it lights up a window here and there, if it brightens the tiled roofs, sets the gilt crosses aflame, whitens the walls, and transforms the atmosphere into a veil of gauze; if it creates rich contrasts with the fantastically-shaped shadows; if the sky is azure-hued and the earth quivering; if the bells speak — then you will gaze in admiration upon one of those eloquent fairy-like spectacles which the imagination never forgets, with which you will be enraptured, bewitched, as by a marvellous view of Naples, Stamboul, or the Floridas. Nor does the concert lack any sort of harmony. There the murmur of the world and

the poetic calm of solitude, the voices of a million human beings and the voice of God — all are heard. There lies a great capital beneath the peaceful cypresses of Père-Lachaise.

One morning in spring, when the sun was revealing all the beauties of that landscape, I stood leaning against a great elm, whose yellow blossoms waved in the wind, and gazed in admiration on the scene before me. But as I looked upon that sublime picture, I thought bitterly of the contempt that we profess, even in our books, for the France of to-day. I cursed the unfortunate rich, who, wearied of our own fair land, purchase with gold the right to despise it by visiting at a gallop and examining through an opera-glass the landscapes of that Italy which has become so vulgar. I was fondly contemplating modern Paris, and musing profoundly, when suddenly the sound of a kiss disturbed my solitude and put philosophy to flight. On the path at the top of the steep hillside at whose foot flows the shimmering stream, looking across the Pont des Gobelins, I saw a woman, apparently quite young, dressed with the most refined simplicity, whose sweet face seemed to reflect the joyous humor of the landscape. A handsome young man was just setting on the ground the prettiest little boy it is possible to imagine, so that I never knew whether the kiss had echoed on the mother's cheek or the child's. The same thought, loving and eager, shone in the eyes, the smile, the motions of the two young people. They entwined their arms with such joyful haste and drew near each other with such wondrous unanimity of movement, that, being wrapped up in themselves, they did not notice my presence.

But another child, dissatisfied and sulking, whose back was turned to them, glanced at me with an expression in

her eyes that impressed me. Letting her brother run about alone, sometimes behind, sometimes before his mother and the young man, this second child, who was as lovely and as graceful as the other, but less robust in figure, stood silent and motionless, in the attitude of a benumbed serpent. It was a little girl.

There was a something mechanical in the gait of the lovely young woman and her companion. Contenting themselves, perhaps merely as a distraction, with the short distance between the little bridge and a carriage standing at the bend in the boulevard, they walked back and forth again and again, stopping, looking at each other, laughing, according to the turn taken by a conversation that was by turns animated and desultory, merry and serious.

Hidden by the great elm, I enjoyed that delightful scene, and I should doubtless have respected its privacy had I not detected on the brooding and taciturn face of the little girl indications of meditation more profound than was suited to her age. When her mother and the young man turned, after walking near to where she stood, she put her head forward with a crafty air, and flashed at them, as well as at her brother, a stealthy glance of most extraordinary malevolence. But no words could describe the piercing keenness, the artless malice, the fierce attention which animated that childish face with its faintly circled eyes, when the young woman, or her companion, patted the fair curls or the white neck of the little boy, when, in sport, he tried to keep in step with them. Surely there was the mature passion of a man upon that strange child's thin face. She was either in pain or deep in thought. And which is the most unerring forerunner of death in such young creatures, just breaking

into bloom: is it suffering of the body, or premature reflection consuming their minds, which have scarcely begun to germinate? For my part, I can conceive nothing more horrible than an old man's burden of thought on a child's brow; even blasphemy on a maiden's lips is less unnatural. So that the almost stolid manner of that prematurely pensive child, the infrequency of her movements, interested me profoundly. I scrutinized her with curiosity. Obeying the natural impulse of an observer I compared her with her brother, trying to detect the resemblances and differences between them. She had dark brown hair, black eyes, and a precocious strength which presented a striking contrast to the fair hair, sea-green eyes and graceful fragility of the little boy. She was perhaps seven or eight years old, he barely four. They were dressed much alike; but on examining them closely, I noticed in the collars of their shirts a difference, trivial enough, but which later disclosed to me a romance in the past, a drama in the future. It was a very small matter. The little dark-haired girl's collar had a simple hem, while her young brother's was bordered with pretty embroidery, betraying a secret, unspoken preference which children read in their mother's hearts as if the spirit of God were in them.

Heedless and joyous, the fair-haired boy resembled a little girl, his white skin was so soft, his movements so graceful, his expression so sweet; whereas the girl, despite her strength, despite the beauty of her features and the brilliancy of her complexion, resembled a sickly boy. Her flashing eyes, which had none of the vapory moisture that gives so great charm to the glances of children, seemed, like a courtier's, to have been scorched by an internal fire. And her very whiteness had an indefinable

sallow, greenish tinge — the symptom of an energetic character.

Twice her young brother had come to her and offered her, with a touching grace, with a pretty smile and an expression that would have enchanted Charlet, the little hunting-horn upon which he blew at intervals; but both times she had replied only with a savage glance to his — “Here, Hélène, don’t you want it?” spoken in an affectionate tone. And, gloomy and threatening beneath her seemingly careless manner, the little girl flushed and shuddered when her brother drew near; but he seemed not to observe his sister’s black humor, and his heedlessness, blended with eager interest, put the finishing touch to the contrast between the natural disposition of childhood and the thought-worn knowledge of the grown man, which was already written on the little girl’s face and darkened it with its heavy clouds.

“Mamma, Hélène won’t play with me,” cried the little fellow, seizing the moment to complain when his mother and the young man were standing silently on the bridge.

“Let her alone, Charles. You know that she’s always cross.”

These words, uttered thoughtlessly by the mother, who turned away the next moment with the young man, brought tears to Hélène’s eyes. She forced them back silently, cast upon her brother one of those profound glances which were unfathomable to me, then turned her eyes with sinister meaning, first at the bank on the top of which he was standing, then at the river Bièvre, the bridge, the surrounding country, and myself.

I was afraid of being seen by the happy couple, whose conversation I should doubtless have disturbed; so I quietly withdrew and took shelter behind a hedge of

alders, whose foliage concealed me completely from all their eyes. I lay tranquilly on the top of the bank, gazing silently at the changing beauties of the scene and at the fierce little girl, of whom I could still catch a glimpse through the space between the foliage and the foot of the alders, on which my head rested, almost on the level of the boulevard.

When she could no longer see me, H  l  ne seemed disturbed; her black eyes sought me on the path and behind the trees, with inexplicable interest. What was I to her? At that moment Charles's innocent laugh rang out in the silence like the song of a bird. The handsome young man, fair-haired like him, was tossing him in his arms and kissing him, with a profusion of the inconsequent little sentences, distorted from their real meaning, which we all say affectionately to children. The mother smiled at this fooling, and, from time to time, said, in an undertone no doubt, words that came straight from the heart; for her companion paused, flushed with happiness, and turned upon her a blue eye full of fire and of idolatry. Their voices, blended with the child's, had an indefinitely caressing effect. They were charming, all three.

That delightful scene, amid that magnificent landscape, exhaled an incredible charm. A beautiful woman, fair and smiling, a child of love, a man in the very flower of youth. a cloudless sky — in a word, all the harmonies of nature combined to rejoice the soul. I surprised myself smiling as if that happiness were my own.

The young man heard the clock strike nine. Having fondly embraced his companion, who had become grave and almost sad, he walked toward his tilbury, which was coming slowly to meet him, driven by an old servant. The babble of the beloved child mingled with the last kisses

the young man bestowed upon the mother. And when he had stepped into his carriage, and while the woman stood watching it as it disappeared in the distance and following its course by the cloud of dust, along the green roadway of the boulevard, Charles ran to his sister by the bridge, and I heard him say to her in a silvery voice:

“Why did n’t you come and say good-bye to my dear friend?”

When she saw her brother on the sloping bank, Hélène cast at him the most frightful glance that ever gleamed in the eyes of a child, and pushed him in a burst of rage. Charles slipped down the steep slope, tripping over roots which threw him violently down on the sharp stones of the wall; he bruised his head on them, and then, covered with blood, fell into the muddy water of the river. The water parted in a myriad of dark circles under the pretty blond head. I heard the poor child’s piercing shrieks; but his voice soon died away, choked by the mud, in which he disappeared with a dull splash like that made by a stone. The lightning is not more rapid than that fall. I sprang to my feet and ran down to the stream by a path. Hélène, utterly stupefied by what she had done, was uttering piercing shrieks: —

“Mamma! mamma!”

The mother was there, by my side. She had flown like a bird. But neither her eyes nor mine could make out the exact spot where the child had disappeared. At that point there are ten feet of slime in the bed of the Bièvre. The child must inevitably perish, it was impossible to save him. At that time of day, on Sunday, everything is at rest. There are neither fishermen nor boats in the Bièvre. I could not discover a pole to sound the ill-smelling mud, or any living being in the neighborhood.



Why should I have told of that sinister mishap, or revealed the secret of that catastrophe? Perhaps Hélène had avenged her father. Doubtless her jealousy was the sword of God. And yet, I shuddered as I glanced at the mother. To what terrible questioning would not her husband, her eternal judge, force her to submit? And she would carry about with her an incorruptible witness. Childhood has a transparent brow, a diaphanous complexion; and, in childhood, a lie is like a bright light which reddens even the glance. The unhappy woman did not think as yet of the torture that awaited her at home. She was looking at the Bièvre. Such an occurrence was certain to cause terrible and lasting effects in a woman's life, and the following is one of the most terrible echoes which from time to time disturbed Julie's amours.

Two or three years later, one evening after dinner, a notary was present in the salon of the Marquis de Vandenesse (then in mourning for his father), who had the matter of his succession to settle. This was not Sterne's little notary, but a stout, well-to-do notary of Paris, one of those estimable persons who do a foolish thing with moderation, place their feet heavily on an unknown sore, and ask why you complain. If by chance they learn the wherefore of their murderous asininity, they say: "On my word, I did n't know anything about it!" In short, he was an honestly stupid notary who saw nothing in life but notarial documents.

Madame d'Aiglemont was with the diplomatist. The general had courteously left before the end of dinner to take his two children to the play, at the Ambigu-Comique or the Gaieté, on the boulevards. Although melodramas overexcite the feelings, they are supposed, in Paris, to be within the range of childhood, and not dangerous, because

innocence always triumphs. They had gone without waiting for the dessert, the children had begged so hard to be at the theatre before the curtain rose.

The notary, the imperturbable notary, incapable of wondering why Madame d'Aiglemont sent her husband and children to the play without her, had been, since dinner, like one screwed to his chair. An argument had lengthened the sitting at dessert, and the servants were slow about serving the coffee. These delays, which consumed valuable time no doubt, drew forth impatient gestures from the charming woman; she might have been compared to a horse pawing the ground before the race.

The notary, who was not a connoisseur in horses or in women, simply thought the marchioness a lively and sparkling lady. Enchanted to be in the society of a woman of fashion and a political celebrity, he indulged in witticisms; he mistook for approbation the mechanical smile of the marchioness, whom he bored beyond measure, and he kept on. The master of the house, in collusion with his companion, had ventured to remain absolutely silent several times when the notary expected a laudatory response; but during these significant pauses, the devil of a fellow had stared at the fire trying to remember other anecdotes. Then the diplomatist had recourse to his watch. Lastly, the lady put on her hat as if to go, and did not go. The notary neither saw nor heard anything; he was enchanted with himself and sure of interesting the marchioness sufficiently to nail her to her place.

"I shall certainly have this woman for a client," he said to himself.

The marchioness was standing, drawing on her gloves, twisting her fingers, and glancing alternately at the Marquis de Vandenesse, who shared her impatience, and at

the notary, who was carefully testing each of his shafts of wit. At every pause the excellent man made, the comely couple drew a long breath, saying to each other by a glance: "At last, he is going!" But no. It was a moral nightmare which was destined to end by angering the two passionate creatures upon whom the notary acted as a snake acts upon birds, and to force them to adopt some sharp remedy.

In the midst of the recital of the disgraceful methods by which du Tillet, a man of affairs then in high repute, had made his fortune, the infamous details being scrupulously described by the witty notary, the diplomatist heard the clock strike nine. He saw that his notary was unquestionably an ass whom he must simply dismiss without ceremony, and he checked him resolutely with a gesture.

"Do you want the tongs, monsieur le marquis?" queried the notary, handing them to his client.

"No, monsieur; I am obliged to send you away. Madame desires to join her children, and I am to have the honor of accompanying her."

"Nine o'clock already! time flies like a shadow in the company of pleasant people," said the notary, who had been talking all by himself for an hour.

He found his hat, then planted himself in front of the fireplace, restrained a hiccough with difficulty, and said to his client, unconscious of the marchioness's blasting glances: —

"Let us sum up, monsieur le marquis. Business before everything. To-morrow, then, we will take out a summons against monsieur your brother, to bring him into court; then we will go on to the inventory, and, faith —"

The notary had so ill understood his client's wishes

that he proposed to go about the business in a way directly opposed to the instruction he had just received. This incident was too important for Vandenesse not to correct involuntarily the lumbering notary's ideas, and there ensued a discussion which took some time.

"Look you," said the diplomatist at last, at a sign from the young woman, "you are driving me wild; come to-morrow at nine with my advocate."

"But I have the honor of suggesting, monsieur le marquis, that we are not sure of finding Monsieur Desroches to-morrow; and if the summons is n't issued before noon, the time will expire, and —"

At this moment a carriage drove into the courtyard, and at the sound the poor woman turned away to conceal the tears that came to her eyes. The marquis rang, to send word that he was out; but the general, who had returned unexpectedly from the Gaieté, preceded the footman and appeared in the doorway, having in one hand his little girl's, whose eyes were red, and in the other his little boy's, angry and sullen.

"What on earth has happened?" the wife asked her husband.

"I'll tell you about it later," the general replied, walking toward a boudoir adjoining, the door of which was open, and where he saw the newspapers.

The marchioness, greatly annoyed, threw herself in desperation on a couch.

The notary, deeming it incumbent on him to be nice to the children, said in a cajoling tone: —

"Well, my boy, what did they play at the theatre?"

"*La Vallée du torrent*," grumbled Gustave.

"On my word as a man of honor," said the notary, "the authors of our day are half mad! *La Vallée du torrent*!

Why not *Le Torrent de la vallee*? It's possible that there's a valley without a torrent, and if they'd said "the torrent in the valley," they'd have indicated something clear, precise, comprehensible. But never mind that. Now, how can there be a drama in a torrent and in a valley? You will tell me that in these days the principal attraction of that sort of performance lies in the scenery, and that that title promises very beautiful scenery. — Did you have a good time, my little man?" he added, seating himself in front of the child.

"Oh! yes, monsieur, I had a good time," the child replied. "There was a nice little boy in the play, who was all alone in the world, because his papa could n't be his papa. And when he's on top of the bridge over the river, a great big man with a beard, all dressed in black, throws him into the water. Then H  l  ne began to cry and sob; the whole audience shouted at us, and father brought us away, right straight away."

M. de Vandenesse and the marchioness both sat as if stupefied, attacked by a cruel pain which deprived them of the power to think or act.

"Hush, Gustave!" cried the general. "I forbade you to mention what happened at the theatre, and you have already forgotten my orders."

"I beg your lordship to pardon me, monsieur le marquis," said the notary; "I did wrong to question him, but I was not aware of the gravity of —"

"He should not have answered," said the father, looking coldly at his son.

The cause of the abrupt return of the children and their father seemed to be well understood by the diplomatist and the marchioness. The mother looked at her daughter, saw that she was in tears, and rose to go to her; but her

features contracted violently, indicating a severity which there was nothing to moderate.

"Enough, Hélène," she said, "go into the boudoir and dry your tears."

"What has she done, pray, the poor child?" asked the notary, seeking to allay at once the mother's wrath and the daughter's grief. "She is so pretty that she must be the best little creature on earth. I am very sure, madame, that she affords you nothing but joy; is n't that so, my child?"

Hélène, trembling, looked at her mother, wiped away her tears, tried to compose her features, and fled into the boudoir.

"And assuredly, madame," the notary droned on, "you are too good a mother not to love all your children equally. Indeed, you are too virtuous to entertain one of those deplorable preferences whose fatal effects are disclosed to us notaries more than to other people. Society passes through our hands; so that we see the passions in their most hideous guise — self-interest. Here is a mother who wishes to disinherit her husband's children for the benefit of the children she prefers to them; while, on his side, the husband sometimes wants to reserve his fortune for the child that has merited its mother's hatred. And then there are contests and alarms and decrees and counter-decrees and forged letters and trusts — in a word, a pitiable wreck, on my honor! pitiable! And then there are fathers who pass their lives disinheriting their children and stealing their wives' property. Yes, stealing is the word. — We were talking of the drama: ah! I assure you that if we could tell the secret of certain donations our authors could base some appalling bourgeois tragedies on them! I don't know what power women possess to do what they please; for, despite appearances, and their weakness, it's always

they who carry the day. Ah! they don't fool me, I tell you. I always divine the reason of these preferences which in society are politely described as indefinable! But husbands never guess it — we must do them that justice. You will reply that there are charms —”

Hélène, who had returned to the salon with her father, listened attentively to the notary, and understood him so well that she cast an apprehensive glance at her mother, foreseeing, with the instinct of a child, that this episode would intensify the severity that hovered over her. The marchioness turned pale, as, with a gesture of dismay, she called Vandenesse's attention to her husband, who was gazing thoughtfully at the flowers on the carpet. Thereupon the diplomatist, despite his *savoir-vivre*, could contain himself no longer, and said to the notary with a withering look: —

“Come this way, monsieur.”

And he walked hastily toward the room adjoining the salon.

The notary followed, in fear and trembling, without finishing his sentence.

“Monsieur,” said Vandenesse, with concentrated fury, slamming the door of the salon where he had left the husband and wife, “since dinner you have done nothing but make a fool of yourself and say idiotic things. For God's sake go away! you will end by causing the most terrible catastrophe. If you are a good notary, stay in your office; but if you ever chance to find yourself in society, try to be more circumspect.”

With that he returned to the salon, leaving the notary without bidding him good-night. That functionary stood for a moment bewildered, paralyzed, without an idea where he was. When the buzzing in his ears ceased, he

fancied that he heard groans and people rushing about in the salon, where the bells were rung violently. He was afraid to encounter the Marquis de Vandenesse again, and he recovered the use of his legs to slink away and reach the stairway; but at the door of the salon he ran into the footmen hastening to take their master's orders.

"That 's just like all these great nobles," he said to himself when at last he was in the street looking for a cab; "they urge you to speak and encourage you by compliments; you think you 're entertaining them — but not at all! They make impertinent remarks to you, keep you at a distance, and even throw you out of doors without ceremony. However, I was very clever; I said nothing that was not sensible and well put and proper. Faith! he advises me to be more circumspect, but I don't lack that quality. Deuce take me! I 'm a notary, and a member of my guild. Bah! it was just an ambassador's freak — nothing 's sacred to those people. To-morrow he 'll have to explain to me how I did nothing but make a fool of myself and said nothing but idiotic things. I 'll demand satisfaction — that is to say, I 'll ask him to explain. After all, perhaps I was wrong. On my word, I 'm very good-natured to puzzle my brain about it! What difference does it make to me?"

The notary went home and submitted the riddle to his notaress, narrating the events of the evening from point to point.

"My dear Crottat, his Excellency was absolutely right in telling you that you did nothing but make a fool of yourself and say idiotic things."

"Why so?"

"If I should tell you, my dear, that would n't prevent you from doing it again to-morrow. But I advise you



once more never to talk about anything but business in society."

"If you won't tell me, I 'll ask —"

"Great Heaven! the stupidest people try to conceal such things, and you think an ambassador's going to tell them to you! Why, Crottat, I never knew you to talk so utterly without sense!"

"Thanks, my dear!"

## V.

## THE TWO MEETINGS.

A FORMER orderly of Napoléon, whom we shall call simply the marquis or the general, and who attained an eminent position under the Restoration, had gone for the fine season to Versailles, where he occupied a country house between the church and the Barrière de Montreuil, on the road leading to the Avenue de Saint-Cloud. His service at court did not permit him to leave the neighborhood of Paris.

Erected long ago to shelter the ephemeral love-affairs of some grand seigneur, the pavilion had very extensive grounds. Standing in the midst of its vast gardens, it was equally removed from the first houses of Montreuil on one side, and from the hovels about the barrier on the other; so that, while not altogether isolated, the owners of that property enjoyed all the delights of solitude within a few steps of a town. By a strange contradiction, the facade and the front door of the house were directly on the road, which perhaps was unfrequented in former days. This hypothesis seems probable if we remember that it leads to the charming pavilion built by Louis XV for Mademoiselle de Romans, and that before reaching it, curious observers recognize here and there more than one *casino* whose interior decorations and arrangement reveal the clever debaucheries of our ancestors, who, in the licentiousness of which they are accused, sought darkness and secrecy.

One evening in winter, the marquis, his wife, and their children were alone in that lonely house. Their servants had obtained permission to go to Versailles to celebrate the marriage of one of their number; and assuming that the festival of Christmas, in conjunction with the other, would serve as a valid excuse with their masters, they did not hesitate to devote to the festivities a little more time than had been allotted them in the domestic orders of the day. And yet, as the general was known as a man who never failed to keep his word with inflexible rectitude, the culprits did not continue their dancing without some twinges of remorse when the time for them to return had passed.

The clock had struck eleven and not a servant had appeared. The profound silence made it possible to hear, at intervals, the light breeze whistling through the black branches of the trees, moaning about the house, or sighing in the long corridors. The frost had so purified the air, hardened the ground, and dried the pavements, that everything had that crisp sonority that always takes us by surprise. The heavy step of a tardy drinker, or the rumble of a cab returning to Paris echoed more sharply and held the ear longer than usual. The dead leaves, set in motion by sudden gusts of wind, danced over the stones of the courtyard in a way to give a voice to the night when it would fain be dumb. It was, in short, one of those sharp evenings which extort from our selfishness a word of pity for the poor man or the traveller, and make the chimney-corner so delicious to us.

But the family assembled in the salon were disturbed neither by the absence of the servants, nor by the thought of the homeless, nor by the poesy inherent in a winter evening. Without unseasonable philosophizing, and

trusting in the protection of an old soldier, women and children abandoned themselves to the joy that home-life engenders in us when the sentiments are not denied free play, when affection and sincerity enliven our language, our glances, and our games.

The general was seated, or, to speak more accurately, buried, in a high-backed, spacious *bergère*, at the corner of the hearth, on which a bright fire was burning, giving forth the enticing warmth which indicates excessive cold out of doors. Leaning against the back of the chair, and falling a little to one side, that gallant father's head rested in an attitude whose indolence expressed perfect tranquillity, the placid expansiveness of content. His arms, half asleep, thrown languidly over the arms of the chair, gave the finishing touch to that picture of a mind at ease. He was gazing at the smallest of his children, a boy barely five years of age, who, being half-naked, refused to allow his mother to finish undressing him. The urchin fled from the night-shirt and cap with which his mother sometimes threatened him; he still wore his embroidered collar, and laughed at his mother when she called him, seeing that she herself laughed at his childish rebellion. Then he began to play with his sister, who was as artless but more mischievous, and who could already speak more distinctly than he, whose vague words and confused ideas were scarcely intelligible to his parents.

Little Moïna, two years his senior, provoked by her tricks — unmistakably feminine, despite her youth — endless bursts of laughter, which went off like rockets without apparent cause; but, watching them rolling about before the fire, displaying without shame their pretty, plump bodies, their graceful white figures, mingling their dark and fair curls, bumping their rosy cheeks,

whereon joy fashioned the dimples of innocence, a father and mother would assuredly understand those little beings, whose characters were already formed, whose passions were already visible to their eyes. The two angels, with the bright hues of their limpid eyes, of their glowing cheeks, of their white skin, dimmed the lustre of the flowers in the soft carpet, the stage of their struggles, on which they fell, overthrew each other, fought, and rolled about without danger.

On a *causeuse* at the other corner of the hearth sat the mother, surrounded by scattered articles of clothing, a red shoe in her hand, in an attitude of careless ease. Her hesitating severity died in a sweet smile graven on her lips. About thirty-six years of age, she still retained a certain beauty due to the rare perfection of the outlines of her face, to which the heat, the light, and happiness imparted at that moment a supernatural brilliancy. Again and again she ceased to look at her children and turned her caressing eyes upon her husband's grave face; and sometimes, as they met, the eyes of the husband and wife exchanged mute glances of enjoyment and profound reflections.

The general's face was deeply sunburned. His broad, smooth brow was streaked by a few locks of grizzly hair. The manly gleam of his blue eyes, the physical courage written in the wrinkles of his cheeks, announced that he had bought by hard service the red ribbon that adorned his buttonhole. At this moment the innocent joys of his two children were reflected on his powerful and resolute face, upon which could be read an indescribable sincerity and good-humor. The old soldier had become a little boy again without great effort. Is there not always more or less love for childhood in those soldiers who have had

enough experience of the woes of life to realize the disadvantages of strength and the privileges of weakness?

Farther from the fire, at a round table lighted by astral lamps whose bright light overmatched the pale gleam of the candles on the mantel, sat a boy of thirteen turning rapidly the pages of a thick volume. The shrieks of his brother and sister did not divert his attention, and his face was alight with the curiosity of youth. His profound absorption was justified by the alluring wonders of the "Thousand and One Nights," and by his school-boy's uniform. He sat perfectly still, in a meditative attitude, one elbow on the table and his head resting on one of his hands, the white fingers standing out against the dark brown hair. With the light falling full upon his face, while the rest of the body was in shadow, he resembled those dark portraits in which Raphael represented himself, leaning forward, watchful, thinking of the future.

Between this table and the marchioness, a tall and lovely girl sat at an embroidery-frame, bending her head over it and withdrawing it by turns, while her artistically plaited coal-black hair reflected the light. Hélène was, in herself, a spectacle. Her beauty was distinguished by a rare combination of force and refinement. Although her hair was high, dressed in such a way as to form a sharply outlined structure about her head, it was so abundant that, refusing to submit to the comb, it lay in profuse curls at the nape of the neck. Her eyebrows, which were very heavy and beautifully arched, contrasted with the whiteness of her smooth forehead. Even on her upper lip she had a few tokens of courage which made a faint dark line beneath a Grecian nose of an exquisite perfection of outline. But the captivating plumpness of her figure, the innocent expression of her other features,

the transparence of her delicate skin, the voluptuous droop of the lips, the perfect oval of the face, and above all the sanctity of her virgin glance, gave to that vigorous beauty the feminine suavity, the fascinating modesty which we exact of such angels of peace and love. But there was nothing fragile about the maid, and her heart was likely to be as gentle and her soul as strong as her proportions were magnificent, and her face attractive.

She imitated the silence of her schoolboy brother, and seemed to be absorbed in one of those fateful fits of meditation characteristic of young girls, which are often impenetrable to the observation of a father, and even to the sagacity of a mother; so that it was impossible to say whether the fitful shadows that passed across her face, like light clouds over a pure sky, should be ascribed to the tricks of the light, or to some secret trouble.

The two elder children were at that moment utterly forgotten by the husband and wife. But more than once the general's questioning glance had taken in the silent scene in the middle distance, which afforded a charming realization of the hopes foreshadowed in the childish romps in the foreground of that domestic picture. Those various figures, interpreting human life by gradual stages of growth, composed a sort of living poem. The elegance of the decorations of the salon, the diverse attitudes, the contrasts due to garments of different colors, the other contrasts of those faces so sharply characterized by their differences, and by the outlines which the light brought into relief, produced upon those human pages all the splendor of design demanded of sculptors, painters, and writers. And lastly, silence and the winter, solitude and darkness, lent their majesty to that sublime and artless composition, — an enchanting effect of nature.

Conjugal life is full of such consecrated hours, whose indescribable charm is due, it may be, to some reminder of a better world. Doubtless rays from heaven pour down upon scenes of this sort, which are destined to recompense man for a part of his sufferings, and to reconcile him to life. It seems to us that the whole world is there before us in a most beguiling form, that it is setting forth its inspiring ideas of decency and order, that social life is pleading in behalf of its laws by appealing to the future.

But despite the tender glances bestowed by Hélène upon Moina and Abel when their joyous laughter rang out, despite the happiness depicted on her speaking face when she stole a furtive look at her father, there was an expression of profound melancholy in her movements, in her attitude, and above all in her eyes, veiled by their long lashes. Her strong white hands, through which the light shone, giving to them a transparent, almost fluid flush, — her hands trembled. Once only did her eyes and the marchioness's meet, without mutual distrust. The two women understood each other by virtue of a glance that in Hélène was lifeless, cold, but respectful, in her mother, dark and threatening. Hélène quickly lowered her eyes to her embroidery-frame, plied her needle swiftly, and for a long time did not raise her head, which seemed to have become too heavy to bear.

Was the mother too harsh to her daughter, and did she consider such harsh treatment necessary? Was she jealous of the charms of Hélène, whom she might still hope to rival, but only by resorting to all the resources of the toilet? Or had the daughter — as many daughters do when they become keen of sight — discovered secrets which her mother, apparently so religiously loyal to her



duties, believed that she had buried in her heart as deep as in the grave?

Hélène had reached an age when purity of soul inclines one to a rigidity of conduct that exceeds the just moderation which should govern the sentiments. In certain minds mistakes assume the proportions of crime; in such cases the imagination reacts on the conscience, and many young women exaggerate the punishment in proportion to their idea of the heinousness of the crime. Hélène seemed to deem herself worthy of no one. A secret of her earlier life, an accident perhaps, not understood at first, but developed by the susceptibility of her intellect which was strongly influenced by religious feeling, seemed to have recently degenerated romantically, as it were, in her own eyes. This change in her demeanor had begun on the day when she read, in translation, the fine tragedy of "Wilhelm Tell," by Schiller. After reproving her daughter for dropping the book, the mother had noticed that the tumult aroused in the child's mind by reading it, came from the scene where the poet suggests a sort of fraternity between Tell, who sheds one man's blood to save a whole people, and John the Parricide. Hélène, having suddenly become meditative, pious, and humble, no longer wished to go to balls. She had never been so affectionate to her father, especially when the marchioness was not present to witness her girlish cajoleries. Nevertheless, if there was any coolness in Hélène's affection for her mother, it was expressed so craftily that the general was not likely to notice it, however jealously he might watch for signs of disunion in his family. No man's eye would have been keen-sighted enough to sound the depth of those two feminine hearts, — one young and impulsive, the other sensitive and proud; the older a treasury of indulgence,

the other overflowing with delicacy and love. If the mother made her daughter unhappy by adroit woman's despotism, it was manifest to no eyes but the victim's.

However, the dénouement alone gives rise to all these insoluble conjectures. Until the night in question no accusing light had escaped from those two hearts; but between them and God, assuredly, there was some ill-boding mystery.

"Come, Abel," called the marchioness, seizing a moment when Moïna and her brother, being exhausted, were silent and at rest; "come, my son, you must go to bed."

And, with an imperative glance she took him on her lap.

"Why!" said the general, "it's after eleven, and not one of our servants has come home! The rascals!—Gustave," he continued, turning to his son, "I gave you that book only on condition that you would put it by at ten o'clock; you should have shut it yourself at that time, and have gone to bed, as you promised. If you want to be a man of mark, you must treat your word as a second religion, and cling to it as to your honor. Fox, one of the greatest of English orators, was especially remarkable for the beauty of his character. Loyalty to his engagements was the most prominent of his good qualities. In his childhood, his father, an Englishman of the old stock, gave him a lesson severe enough to leave an everlasting impression on a young boy's mind. When he was your age, Fox went, during the vacation, to his father's, who, like all rich English, had a park of considerable size around his manor-house. In this park there was an old summer-house which was to be torn down and rebuilt at a spot where there was a magnificent view.

Children delight in seeing things torn down, and young Fox wanted a few additional days of vacation, to be present at the downfall of the summer-house; but his father insisted that he should return to school on the day appointed for the opening of the classes; hence a quarrel between father and son. The mother, like all *mammas*, supported young Fox. Thereupon the father solemnly promised that he would wait until the next vacation before tearing down the summer-house.

“Fox returned to school. His father thought that a small boy, when his mind was diverted by his studies, would forget the incident, so he had the summer-house torn down and rebuilt in the other place. The obstinate boy thought about nothing else. When he went home again, his first thought was to go and see the old building, but he came back, heart-broken, at breakfast-time, and said to his father: ‘You deceived me.’ The old English gentleman replied in confusion, but still with dignity: ‘That is true, my son; I will repair what I have done. A man must cling to his word more than to his fortune; for to keep one’s word brings fortune, and all the fortune on earth will not wipe out the stain on the conscience made by a breach of one’s word.’ So he had the old summer-house rebuilt as it was before; and then ordered it to be torn down before his son’s eyes. Let this be a lesson to you, Gustave.”

Gustave, who had listened attentively to his father, closed his book instantly. There was a moment of silence during which the general seized Moïna, who was struggling against sleep, and held her gently to his breast. The little girl let her swaying head fall on her father’s shoulder, and went sound asleep, enveloped in the pretty golden folds of her hair.

At that moment they heard rapid footsteps on the road, then within the gate; and suddenly three blows on the door woke the echoes of the house. The accent of those prolonged blows was as easy to understand as the cry of a man in danger of death. The watch-dog bayed furiously. Hélène, Gustave, the general, and his wife all started up hastily; but Abel, whose hair his mother was combing, and Moïna, did not wake.

"He's in a hurry, that fellow!" cried the old soldier, putting his daughter down in the *bergère*.

And he abruptly left the salon, not hearing his wife's appeal:—

"Don't go, my dear!"

The marquis went to his bedroom, took a pair of pistols, lighted his dark lantern, rushed to the staircase, descended the stairs like a flash, and was soon at the door, whither his son bravely followed him.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"Open!" replied a voice, almost suffocated by rapid, gasping breaths.

"Are you a friend?"

"Yes, a friend."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, but let me in, for *they* are coming!"

A man glided through the vestibule with the uncanny swiftness of a phantom as soon as the general had partly opened the door; and before he could offer any opposition the stranger forced him to release the door by closing it with a violent kick, and leaned against it with a determined air, as if to prevent its being opened again. The general, presenting his pistol at the stranger's breast, to keep him in order, and raising his lantern, saw a man of medium height wrapped in a fur-lined cloak—an old

man's garment, very full and dragging on the floor, that was evidently not made for him. Whether as a measure of precaution, or by chance, the upper part of the fugitive's face was entirely covered by a hat that came down over his eyes.

"Monsieur," he said to the general, "put down your pistol. I don't propose to stay in your house without your consent; but if I go out, death awaits me at the barrier. And such a death! you would be answerable for it to God. I ask hospitality for two hours. Consider, monsieur, that, earnestly as I implore your aid, I ought to command it with the tyranny of necessity. I seek the hospitality of Arabia. Look upon me as sacred; or else open the door and I will go out to die. What I must have are secrecy, a shelter, and water. Oh! water, water!" he repeated in a voice that sounded like the death-rattle.

"Who are you?" inquired the general, surprised at the feverish volubility with which the stranger spoke.

"Ah! who am I? Well, open the door, and I will go," retorted the man, in a tone of savage irony.

Despite the adroitness with which the marquis handled the rays of his lantern, he could not succeed in seeing anything but the lower part of the man's face, and there was nothing there to plead in favor of the hospitality that he requested in such strange fashion. The cheeks were livid and quivering, and all the features horribly distorted. In the shadow cast by the hat-brim the eyes shone like two bright lights which almost paled the feeble glimmer of the candle. However, it was necessary to make some response.

"Monsieur," said the general, "your language is so extraordinary that, if you were in my place, you —"

"My life is in your hands!" cried the stranger in a terrible tone, interrupting his host.

"For two hours?" asked the marquis, still undecided.

"For two hours!" repeated the man.

But suddenly, with a desperate gesture, he thrust back his hat, uncovered his brow, and, as if with the purpose of making one final effort, he emitted a glance whose keen intensity penetrated the general's being. That outburst of intelligence and determination was like a flash of lightning, and as overwhelming as a thunderbolt; for there are times when men are endowed with an inexplicable power.

"Whoever you are, you will be safe under my roof," said the master of the house gravely, fancying that he was obeying one of those instinctive impulses which a man cannot always explain.

"God do as much for you!" rejoined the stranger, with a long-drawn breath.

"Are you armed?" the general asked.

For all reply, the stranger, barely giving him time to glance at the cloak, hastily threw it open and wrapped it about him again. He was without visible weapons and in ball costume. Brief as was the suspicious soldier's scrutiny, he saw enough to make him exclaim:—

"Where in the devil did you succeed in splashing yourself like that in such dry weather?"

"More questions!" retorted the stranger haughtily.

At this moment the marquis noticed his son and recalled the lecture he had just given him with respect to the strict performance of a promise; he was so intensely annoyed by that incident, that he said to him in a tone not wholly devoid of anger:—

"You little rascal, how do you happen to be here instead of in your bed?"

"Because I thought I might be of some use if you were in danger," Gustave replied.

"Well, go up to your room," said the father, softened by the boy's answer. "And do you," he said, addressing the stranger, "follow me."

They fell silent, like two gamblers who distrust each other. Indeed, the general began to be disturbed by unpleasant forebodings. The unknown was already weighing on him like a nightmare. But, impelled by the sanctity of his oath, he led him through corridors and up stairways to a large room on the second floor, directly over the salon. That unoccupied apartment was used as a drying-room in winter, had no door of communication with any other room, and on its four yellow walls no other decorations than a wretched looking-glass left hanging over the mantel by the last owner, and a large mirror which the marquis, having no present use for it, had placed temporarily opposite the fireplace when he took possession. The floor of that immense attic had never been swept, the atmosphere was frigid, and there was no furniture except two dilapidated old straw chairs.

Having placed his lantern on the mantel, the general said:—

"Your safety requires that this wretched attic must be your hiding-place. And, as you have my promise of secrecy, you will allow me to lock you in here."

The man bent his head in assent.

"I asked for nothing but secrecy, shelter, and water," he observed.

"I will bring you some water," replied the marquis; and having carefully secured the door, he felt his way down to the salon to get a candle, in order to go himself to the offices for a carafe of water.

"Well, monsieur, what is it?" inquired the marchioness eagerly.

"Nothing, my dear," he replied, with an affectation of indifference.

"But we have been listening, and you took some one upstairs."

"Hélène," said the general, looking at his daughter, who looked up at him, "remember that your father's honor depends on your discretion. You must not have heard anything."

The girl replied with a significant movement of her head. The marchioness was dumfounded and inwardly piqued by the method that her husband adopted to impose silence on her.

The general obtained a carafe and a glass, and went up again to the room where his prisoner was; he found him leaning against the wall, bare-headed, having thrown his hat on one of the two chairs. Evidently he did not expect to be exposed to such a bright light. His brow contracted and his face became clouded when his eyes met the general's piercing glance; but he assumed a more amiable expression to thank his protector. When the latter had placed the carafe and the glass on the mantel, the other, having bestowed another flaming glance on him, broke the silence.

"Monsieur," he said, in a pleasant voice no longer shaken by guttural convulsions, but which nevertheless indicated inward excitement, "I am going to make a most extraordinary request. Pray excuse a caprice that is absolutely necessary. If you stay here, I must beg you not to look at me when I drink."

Vexed at having still to obey a man who was antipathetic to him, the general abruptly turned his back. The



stranger took a white handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped his right hand in it, then he grasped the carafe and drank at a draught the water it contained. Without intending to break his oath, the marquis instinctively glanced at the mirror; but the position of the two mirrors made the stranger perfectly visible to him, and he saw that the handkerchief instantly turned red at the touch of his hands, which were covered with blood.

"Ah! you looked at me!" cried the unknown, scrutinizing the general with a suspicious eye after he had drained the carafe and wrapped himself in his cloak. "I am lost! *They* are coming — here they are!"

"I hear nothing," said the marquis.

"You are not interested as I am in listening in the silence."

"Have you been fighting a duel that you are all covered with blood?" demanded the general, becoming greatly excited when he detected the color of the large wet spots on his guest's garments.

"Yes, a duel — you have said it," echoed the stranger, while a bitter smile played about his lips.

At that moment they heard a number of horses galloping in the distance; but the sound was as faint as the first rays of dawn. The general's practised ear recognized the step of horses trained in the cavalry.

"It is the gendarmes," he said.

He glanced at his prisoner in a way to banish the doubts that his involuntary spying might have aroused, took the light, and returned to the salon. He had hardly placed the key of the upper room on the mantelpiece when the galloping approached the house with a rapidity that made him jump. The next instant the horses stopped at the door. After exchanging a few words with his companions,

one horseman alighted, knocked violently and compelled the general to open the door. The latter could not help feeling some inward perturbation at sight of six gendarmes, whose hats, embroidered with silver, gleamed in the moonlight.

"Monsieur," said the officer in charge, "did n't you hear a man running toward the barrier just now?"

"Toward the barrier? No."

"Have n't you opened your door to any one?"

"Am I in the habit, pray, of opening my door myself?"

"I beg your pardon, general, but it seems to me, at this moment, that —"

"I say!" cried the marquis in an angry tone, "do you presume to jest with me? have you any right to —?"

"No, no, monseigneur," replied the officer mildly. "You must excuse my zeal. We know that a peer of France does n't take the risk of sheltering a murderer at this time of night; but our anxiety to obtain information —"

"A murderer!" exclaimed the general. "In heaven's name who has been —"

"Monsieur le Baron Mauny was killed only a short time ago, with an axe," replied the gendarme. "But the murderer is hotly pursued. We are certain that he's in the neighborhood, and we must go and track him down. Excuse us, general."

The gendarme was talking as he remounted his horse, so that it was not possible for him, luckily, to see the general's face. Being accustomed to assume anything, he might have conceived some suspicions at the appearance of that open countenance upon which the impressions of the mind were so faithfully pictured.

"Is the name of the murderer known?" the general asked.

"No. He left the desk full of gold and notes untouched."

"Then it 's a case of vengeance," said the marquis.

"What! on an old man? No, no; the villain could n't have had time to do the trick."

The gendarme galloped after his companions, who were already at some distance. For a moment the general stood still, in a state of perplexity not difficult to comprehend. Soon he heard his servants returning; they were discussing something with some heat, and their voices could be heard in the square of Montreuil. When they arrived, his wrath, which only needed a pretext for venting itself, fell upon them like a thunderbolt. His voice made the very echoes tremble. But he became suddenly calm when the boldest and most cunning of them, his valet de chambre, explained their delay by saying that they had been stopped on the outskirts of Montreuil by gendarmes looking for a murderer. The general instantly stopped talking. Then, reminded by the word of the necessities of his position, he sharply bade all the servants go to bed at once, leaving them agape at the readiness with which he swallowed the valet's falsehood.

But while these things were taking place in the courtyard, an incident, trivial enough in appearance, had changed the situation of the other persons who figure in this narrative. The marquis had no sooner gone out, than his wife, glancing from the key on the mantel to Hélène, finally said in a low tone, leaning toward the girl: —

"Hélène, your father has left the key on the mantel."

Hélène raised her head in amazement, and looked timidly at her mother, whose eyes were sparkling with curiosity.

"Well, mamma?" she replied, in an uncertain voice.

"I would like right well to know what is going on up there. If there's any one there, he has n't stirred. Do go up."

"I?" said the girl, with a shudder of fear.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, mamma, but I thought I could make out a man's step."

"If I could go myself, I would n't ask you to go, Hélène," rejoined the mother in a cold and haughty tone. "If your father should come back and not find me, he might look for me; but he won't notice your absence."

"If you order me to go, madame, I will go; but I shall lose my father's esteem."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the marchioness ironically. "But since you take so seriously what was meant simply as a jest, I order you to go and see who is upstairs. Here 's the key, my child. Your father, when he told you to keep silent about what is going on in his house, did n't forbid you to go up to that room. Go, and remember that a mother is never to be criticised by her daughter."

Having uttered these last words with all the sternness of an offended parent, the marchioness took the key and handed it to Hélène, who rose without a word and left the salon.

"My mother will always find a way to obtain forgiveness; but I shall be ruined in my father's estimation. Does she want to rob me of such affection as he has for me, to drive me from his house?"

Such ideas as these began to run riot in her mind as she walked, without a light, along the corridor at the end of which was the door of the mysterious room. When she reached it there was something ominous in the utter disorder of her thoughts. That sort of confused meditation

had the effect of causing a thousand sentiments hitherto confined in her heart to overflow. It may be that she had already ceased to hope for a happy future, and, at that horrible moment, absolutely despaired of life. She trembled convulsively as she put the key in the lock, and her emotion became so overpowering that she paused a moment and put her hand to her heart, as if it had the power to allay its loud and hurried throbbing. At last she opened the door. Evidently the creaking of the hinges had reached the murderer's ear to no purpose. Although his hearing was very keen, he stood almost as if nailed to the wall, motionless and lost in his thoughts. The circle of light cast by the lantern shone faintly on him, and in that segment of *chiaro-oscuro* he resembled the cheerless statues of chevaliers that are always standing at the corners of dark tombs in gothic chapels. Great drops of sweat stood upon his broad, sallow forehead. Incredible audacity spoke in every feature of that violently distorted face. His fiery eyes, tearless and staring, seemed to be looking on at a battle in the darkness before him. Tumultuous thoughts passed swiftly over that face, whose resolute and unwavering expression denoted a powerful character. His body, his proportions, his attitude, were all in harmony with his savage temperament. The fellow was all force, all strength, and he scrutinized the darkness as a visible image of his own future.

Accustomed to look upon the vigorous faces of the giants who surrounded Napoléon, and engrossed by a sort of moral curiosity, the general had paid no heed to the physical peculiarities of that extraordinary man; but Hélène, being, like all women, extremely sensitive to outward impressions, was struck by the mingling of light and shadow, of grandeur and passion, in a poetic chaos which gave to

the stranger something of the aspect of Lucifer rising after his fall.

Suddenly the storm pictured upon that face subsided as by magic, and the undefinable despotic influence of which the unknown was, unconsciously perhaps, both the cause and the result, diffused itself about him with the increasing rapidity of an inundation. A torrent of thoughts issued from his brow at the very moment when his features assumed their natural shapes. Fascinated, whether by the strangeness of the interview or by the mystery into which she was forcing her way, the girl thereupon saw before her a mild and most interesting countenance. She stood for some minutes in a bewitched silence, disturbed by emotion hitherto unknown to her youthful heart. But soon, whether because H  l  ne had uttered an exclamation or made some movement, or because the assassin, returning from the imaginary to the real world, heard for the first time other breathing than his own, he turned his face toward his host's daughter, and saw indistinctly in the shadow the sublimely beautiful features and the majestic outline of a creature whom he might well have taken for an angel, seeing her stand there motionless, and as ill-defined as a ghost.

"Monsieur —" she said in a trembling voice.

The murderer started.

"A woman!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Is it possible? Go away," he continued. "I acknowledge nobody's right to pity me, to absolve me, or to condemn me. I must live alone. Go, my child," he added, with an imperious wave of the hand; "I should ill requite the service that the master of this house has done me if I allowed a single one of its occupants to breathe the same air with me. I must bow to the world's laws."

This last sentence was uttered in a very low tone. Grasping by his marvellous power of intuition the untold wretchedness that that depressing idea suggested, he cast a serpent's glance at Hélène, and roused in that strange young woman's heart a world of thoughts that were still sleeping there. It was as if a bright light illuminated regions unknown to her. Her spirit was overthrown, conquered, before she could muster strength to defend herself against the magnetic power of that glance, involuntary though it was. Shame-faced and trembling, she left the room and returned to the salon only a moment before her father, so that she could tell her mother nothing.

The general, profoundly preoccupied, paced silently back and forth, with folded arms, from the windows looking on the street to those looking on the garden. His wife was watching Abel who had gone to sleep. Moïna, curled up on the *bergère* like a bird in its nest, was sleeping peacefully. The older sister held a skein of silk in one hand, a needle in the other, and gazed at the fire. The profound silence that reigned in the salon, and the house, and out of doors, was broken only by the slow steps of the servants as they went to bed one after another; by an occasional stifled laugh, the last echo of the wedding and their enjoyment; and by the opening and closing of their doors and their last words to one another. Still later, there were muffled sounds in their bedrooms. A chair fell over. An old coachman coughed feebly, then stopped. Ere long the darkling majesty that abides in sleeping nature held sway everywhere. The stars alone shone. The frost held the earth fast-bound. Not a creature spoke or moved. Only the fire snapped now and then, as if to call attention to the absolute silence.

The clock of Montreuil struck one. At that moment

footsteps, exceedingly light, became faintly audible on the floor above. The marquis and his daughter, sure that M. de Mauny's murderer was safely locked in, ascribed the movement to one of the women, and were not surprised to hear some one open the door of the room adjoining the salon. Suddenly the murderer appeared in their midst. The marquis's stupefaction, the mother's eager curiosity, and the daughter's amazement gave him time to come forward almost to the centre of the salon before he said to the general in a singularly calm and musical voice:—

"Monsieur, the two hours are nearly over."

"You here!" shouted the general. "By what means—"

And with a terrible glance he interrogated his wife and children. Hélène flushed red as fire.

"You," continued the veteran in a tone of intense excitement, "you among us! An assassin covered with blood, in this room! You mar this picture! Go! go!" he added, frantic with rage.

At the word "assassin," the marchioness uttered a shriek. As for Hélène, that word seemed to decide her fate; her face did not indicate the slightest surprise. It was as if she had awaited that man's coming. Her boundless meditations had a meaning. The punishment that Heaven reserved for her sins was made clear to her. Deeming herself to be as guilty as that other, the girl gazed at him with a serene eye; she was his companion, his sister. In her eyes this incident was manifestly a command from God. A few years later the light of reason would have done away with her agonies of remorse, but at that moment they made her mad.

The stranger stood there, cold and impassive. A



disdainful smile played over his features and about his heavy red lips.

"This is an ill return for the generosity of my conduct toward you," he said slowly. "I would not touch with my hands the glass in which you gave me water to quench my thirst. I did not even think of washing my bloody hands under your roof, and I go away leaving here only the idea of *my crime*" (at these words he pressed his lips together), "having done my best to leave no trace of it. Indeed, I did not even allow your daughter —"

"My daughter!" cried the general, with a horrified glance at Hélène. "Ah! you villain! go, or I will kill you."

"The two hours have not expired. You can neither kill me nor surrender me without forfeiting your own esteem — and mine."

At this last word the general, dumfounded, tried to look at the culprit; but he was forced to lower his eyes, for he felt that he was in no condition to support the intolerable brilliancy of a glance which for the second time threw his whole mental organization into disorder. He was afraid of relenting anew, realizing that he was already beginning to give way.

"To murder an old man! In heaven's name did you never see a family?" he said, pointing with a paternal gesture to his wife and children.

"Yes, an old man," the stranger repeated, frowning slightly.

"Fly!" cried the general, still not daring to look at his guest. "Our agreement is broken. I will not kill you. No! I will never make myself a purveyor to the scaffold. But go! your presence is a horror to us."

"I know it," replied the other, with an air of resignation. "There is no place in France where I can safely set my foot; but if the law were able, as God is, to judge special cases; if it would condescend to inquire which is the monster, the murderer or his victim, I should still hold up my head among men. Can you not conceive of earlier crimes on the part of the victim of the axe? I made myself both judge and executioner; I substituted myself for powerless human justice. That is my crime. Adieu, monsieur. Despite the bitter taste you have given to your hospitality, I shall remember it. I shall keep in my heart a feeling of gratitude for one man on this earth, and you are that man. But I would have had you more generous."

He walked toward the door, whereupon Hélène leaned over to her mother and whispered in her ear.

"Ah!"

This exclamation from his wife startled the general, as if he had seen Moïna lying dead. Hélène was on her feet, and the murderer had turned instinctively, with an expression of solicitude for that charming family on his face.

"What is the matter, my dear?" the marquis asked.

"Hélène wants to go with him," was the reply.

The murderer flushed.

"Since my mother puts such an evil interpretation on an exclamation that was almost involuntary," said Hélène in a low tone, "I will gratify her wishes."

And after looking about her with an air of savage pride, she lowered her eyes, and stood in an attitude instinct with modesty.

"Hélène," said the general, "did you go upstairs to the room where I had left —?"

"Yes, father."

"Hélène," he continued, his voice trembling convulsively, "is this the first time you ever saw this man?"

"Yes, father."

"Then it is n't natural that you should have such an idea as —"

"If it is n't natural, it 's true, at all events, father."

"O my child!" said the marchioness, in an undertone, but so that her husband could hear. "Hélène, you are false to all the principles of honor and modesty and virtue that I have tried to implant in your heart. If you have been nothing but a lie down to this fatal moment, then you are not to be regretted. Is it this stranger's moral perfection that attracts you? Can it be the sort of power that is essential to men who commit crimes? I think too highly of you to suppose that —"

"Oh! suppose anything, madame," rejoined Hélène, coldly.

But despite the strength of character of which she was giving such ample proof, the fire of her eyes could scarcely consume the tears that gathered in them. The stranger guessed the mother's words from the girl's tears, and fastened his eagle's glance upon the marchioness, who was compelled by an irresistible force to look at the terrible wizard. And when her eyes met those other limpid, gleaming eyes, she felt throughout her being a shock like that we feel at the sight of a reptile, or when we touch a Leyden jar.

"My dear," she cried to her husband, "it's the evil one! he sees everything!"

The general started to seize a bell-cord.

"He is going to give you up," said Hélène to the murderer.

The stranger smiled, stepped forward, stayed the

marquis's arm, and compelled him to submit to a glance which emitted a benumbing fire and took away all his energy.

"I am going to pay you for your hospitality," he said, "and we shall be quits. I will save you from a dishonorable act by surrendering myself. After all, what is there for me to live for, now?"

"You can repent," replied H  l  ne, offering him one of those hopes which shine resplendent only in a maiden's eyes.

"I shall never repent," said the murderer in a ringing tone, holding his head proudly erect.

"His hands are stained with blood," said the general to his daughter.

"I will wipe them clean," she replied.

"But," rejoined the general, without venturing to point to the stranger, "do you so much as know that he'll take you?"

The murderer went to H  l  ne, whose beauty, although chaste and meditative, was as if illumined by an inward light, whose rays colored and brought into relief, as it were, each tiniest feature and most delicate outline; and, having bestowed upon that bewitching creature a glance which, though gentle, was terrible still, he said, in a voice that betrayed keen emotion:—

"Should I not prove that I love you for yourself, and at the same time pay for the two hours of life your father sold me, by refusing to accept your devotion?"

"And you, too, you reject me!" cried H  l  ne in a tone that tore her listeners' hearts. "Adieu then, all, I am going to die!"

"What does this mean?" said her father and mother in one breath.

She made no reply, but cast down her eyes after questioning the marchioness with an eloquent glance. From the moment when the general and his wife had tried to combat by speech and act the extraordinary privilege arrogated to himself by the stranger in remaining among them, and when he had overwhelmed them with the bewildering radiance that gushed from his eyes, they had been in the grasp of an inexplicable torpor; and their benumbed faculties were of little assistance to them in repelling the supernatural power to which they were yielding. To them the air had become heavy, and they breathed with difficulty; but they were unable to accuse the man who embarrassed them thus, although an inward voice assured them that that sorcerer was the cause of their powerlessness.

In the midst of this mental agony the general realized that his efforts should be directed toward guiding his daughter's wavering reason; he put his arm about her and led her to a window-recess, at a distance from the murderer.

"My dearest child," he said to her in a low voice, "if some strange passion has sprung up in your heart, your innocent life, your pious and spotless mind have given me too many proofs of strength of character for me not to assume that you have the necessary energy to conquer a mad impulse; so that there must be some mystery hidden beneath your conduct. Well, my heart is full of indulgence, and you can safely confide everything to it; even though you should tear it asunder, I should be able, my child, to conceal my suffering and to maintain a loyal silence concerning your confession. Tell me, are you jealous of our affection for your brothers or your little sister? Is your heart sore from a disappointment in love? Speak, tell me

the reasons that lead you to abandon your family, to deprive it of its greatest charm, to leave your mother and brothers and your little sister."

"Father," she replied, "I am neither jealous nor in love with any one, — not even with your friend Monsieur de Vandenesse, the diplomatist."

The marchioness turned pale, and her daughter, who was watching her, checked herself.

"Must I not sooner or later go away to live under some man's protection?"

"That is true."

"Do we ever know," she continued, "to what sort of persons we entrust our destiny? For my part, I believe in this man."

"Child," said the general, raising his voice, "you do not think of all the suffering you will have to undergo."

"I am thinking of his."

"What a life!" exclaimed the general.

"A woman's life!" murmured the girl.

"You are very knowing!" cried the marchioness, recovering the use of her tongue.

"The questions, madame, suggest the replies; but, if you wish, I will speak more plainly."

"Say anything, my child! I am your mother."

At this, the daughter looked at the mother, and that look caused the latter to pause.

"Hélène," she continued, "I will submit to your reproaches, if you have any to make, rather than see you go with a man whom everybody avoids in horror."

"So you see, madame, that without me he would be alone."

"Enough, madame!" cried the general; "we have only one daughter now!"

And he glanced at Moïna, who was still asleep.

"I will shut you up in a convent," he added, turning to Hélène.

"Very well," she replied, with calm despair. "I shall die there. You are accountable for my life and *his* soul to God alone."

A profound silence followed these words. The spectators of this scene, wherein everything outraged the principles of social life, dared not look at one another. Suddenly the marquis noticed his pistols; he seized one of them, cocked it, and pointed it at the stranger. At the click of the trigger the latter turned and fixed his calm and piercing glance upon the general, whose arm, relaxed by an irresistible lassitude, dropped heavily to his side, and the pistol fell to the floor.

"My child," said he, thereupon, prostrated by that ghastly contest, "you are free. Embrace your mother, if she consents. As for myself, I do not want ever to see you or hear your voice again."

"Hélène," said the marchioness, "remember that you will be destitute."

A sort of sneering laugh, coming from the murderer's powerful chest, drew all eyes to him. His face wore a disdainful expression.

"The hospitality I have offered you costs me dear!" said the general, rising. "You killed only an old man just now; but here you are murdering a whole family. Whatever comes of it, there will be unhappiness in this house."

"But suppose your daughter is happy?" queried the murderer, gazing steadfastly at the soldier.

"If she is happy with you," the father replied, making a mighty effort to control himself, "I shall not regret her."

Hélène knelt timidly at his feet, and said in a caressing tone: —

“O father, I love you and revere you, whether you pour out the treasures of your kindness upon me, or the harsh sentence of disgrace. But, I entreat you, do not let your last words be angry words.”

The general dared not look at her. Meanwhile the stranger came forward and said to Hélène, with a smile in which there was something infernal and divine at once: —

“Come, angel of pity, whom a murderer does not terrify, — come, since you persist in entrusting your destiny to me!”

“This is past belief!” cried the general.

The marchioness, with an extraordinary glance at Hélène, opened her arms, and the girl rushed into them, weeping.

“Adieu,” she said, “adieu, mother!” And she boldly motioned to the stranger, who gave a start. Having kissed her father’s hand and embraced hurriedly, but without pleasure, Moïna and little Abel, she disappeared with the murderer.

“Where are they going?” cried the general, listening to the receding footsteps. “Madame,” he added, addressing his wife, “it seems to me that I am dreaming: there is some mystery hidden from me in this business. You must know what it is.”

The marchioness shuddered.

“For some time past,” she said, “your daughter has been extraordinarily romantic and excited. In spite of the pains I have taken to resist this tendency of hers —”

“I don’t understand —”

But, fancying that he heard his daughter’s footsteps and the stranger’s in the garden, he broke off and hurriedly opened the window.



“Hélène!” he cried.

His voice was lost in the darkness like a vain prophecy. As he uttered that name, to which no one would answer thenceforth, the general broke, as if by enchantment, the spell to which a diabolic power had subjected him. Something like a spirit passed over his face. He saw distinctly the whole scene that had just taken place, and cursed his weakness, which he did not understand. A burning shudder swept from his heart to his head and his feet; he became himself once more, eager for vengeance, and uttered a terrible cry:—

“Help! help!”

He ran to all the bell-cords, and jerked them until they broke after causing a horrible jangling. All his people woke with a start. Meanwhile he, still shouting, opened the windows on the street, called for the gendarmes, found his pistols and fired them to hasten the coming of the officers, the rising of his people, and the assembling of his neighbors. The dogs recognized their master’s voice and bayed, the horses neighed and pawed the floor. There was a horrible uproar in the midst of that tranquil night.

As he hastened downstairs to go in pursuit of his daughter, the general saw his terrified servants assembling from all sides.

“My daughter — Hélène — has been abducted! Go to the garden! Watch the road! Admit the gendarmes! After the murderer!”

With a frantic effort he broke the chain that secured the great watchdog.

“Hélène! Hélène!” he said to him.

The dog leaped like a lion, barked furiously, and rushed into the garden so rapidly that the general could not keep up with him. In another moment he heard horses galloping

along the road, and he made haste to open the gate himself.

"Officer," he cried, "go and cut off the retreat of Monsieur de Mauny's murderer. They have gone through my gardens. Hurry — surround the roads to the Butte de Picardie. I am going to beat up the whole estate, parks and houses. — Do you fellows," he said to his servants, "watch the street and guard the whole line from the barrier to Versailles. Off with you, all!"

He seized a gun that his valet-de-chambre brought him, and darted into the gardens, shouting to the dog: —

"Seek!"

A savage barking in the distance answered him and he went in the direction from which the beast's vociferations seemed to come.

At seven in the morning, the search of the gendarmes, the general, his neighbors, and his servants, had resulted in nothing. The dog had not returned. Overdone with weariness and already aged by grief, the marquis returned to his salon, now a desert to him, although his three other children were there.

"You were very cold to your daughter," he said, looking at his wife. — "And that is all we have left of her!" he added, pointing to the embroidery-frame, on which he saw a flower just begun. "She was here a moment since, and now — lost, lost!"

He wept, hid his face in his hands, and was silent a moment, afraid to look about that salon, which so lately presented the sweetest picture of domestic happiness. The first rays of dawn were struggling with the dying lamps; the candles were burning their festoons of paper; everything was in tune with that unhappy father's despair.

"I shall have to destroy this," he said after a moment's silence, pointing to the frame. "I could n't bear to see anything to remind us of her."

That terrible Christmas night, during which the marquis and his wife had the misfortune to lose their older daughter, who had been unable to resist the extraordinary influence exerted by her involuntary abductor, was, as it were, a warning sent them by Destiny. The failure of a broker ruined the marquis. He mortgaged his wife's property in order to enter into a speculation the profits of which were infallibly to restore his original fortune; but that speculation completed his ruin. In his desperation, driven to resort to any expedient, the general expatriated himself. Six years had passed since he left France. Although his family had heard from him but rarely, a few days before the recognition by Spain of the independence of the South American republics he announced his return.

One fine morning, several French merchants, impatient to return to their fatherland with wealth acquired at the cost of years of toil, and hazardous journeys in Mexico or Colombia, were aboard a Spanish brig within a few leagues of Bordeaux. A man, aged by fatigue or by sorrow more than his years warranted, was leaning on the gunwale, apparently insensible to the spectacle spread before the eyes of the passengers grouped on the after-deck. Having escaped the perils of the voyage across the ocean, and tempted by the beauty of the day, they had all gone on deck as if to salute their native soil. The majority of them insisted that they could see in the distance the lighthouses and buildings of Gascogne or the tower of Cordouan, mingled with the fantastic structures of a mass of white clouds just rising from the horizon. Save for the silvery

fringe of foam that played about the prow of the brig, save for the long, swiftly vanishing furrow that she left behind, the travellers might have believed themselves to be motionless in the midst of the ocean, the sea was so calm. The sky was marvellously pure. The deep shade of the zenith blended by imperceptible stages with the blue of the water, marking the point of junction by a line that sparkled as brightly as the stars at night. The sun was reflected in millions of facets in the vast expanse of sea, so that the boundless watery plains were more luminous, almost, than the spacious fields of the firmament.

All the brig's sails were filled by a wonderfully soft wind, and the snow-white clouds of canvas, the waving ensigns, the labyrinth of cordage, stood out in sharpest outline against the brilliant background of the air, the sky, and the sea, uncolored save by the shadows cast by the fleecy clouds. A fine day, a fresh breeze, the sight of fatherland, a calm sea, a melancholy rustling, a graceful brig, alone, gliding over the water like a woman flying to a rendezvous — all these composed a harmonious picture, a scene whence the eye of man could embrace vast motionless spaces, starting from a point where all was movement. There was a marvellous contrast of solitude and life, of silence and of noise; nor could one say just where the life and noise were, or where the solitude and silence; for no human voice broke that celestial spell.

The Spanish captain, his sailors, and the Frenchmen were seated or standing, absorbed, one and all, by a sort of pious rapture, memory-laden. There was indolence in the air. The cheerful faces indicated entire forgetfulness of past ills, and the men swayed back and forth on that gently moving vessel as in a golden dream. Meanwhile the elderly passenger, leaning against the gunwale,

scanned the horizon from time to time with something like disquietude. On all his features was written distrust of fate, and he seemed to fear that he might never set foot on French soil. That man was the marquis. Fortune had not been deaf to the outcries and the struggles of his despair. After five years of hard and exacting toil he found himself the possessor of a considerable fortune. In his impatience to see his native land once more, and to bring happiness and well-being to his family, he had followed the example of a number of French merchants of Havana, and had taken passage with them on a Spanish vessel bound for Bordeaux. His imagination, weary of foreseeing ill-fortune, drew for him most delightful pictures of his past happiness. When he saw in the distance the brown line of the shore, he fancied that he was looking on his wife and children. He was in his place by the fireside, and could feel their warm embraces and caresses. He imagined how Moïna would look — grown tall and lovely and imposing. When that imaginary picture assumed something very like reality, tears gathered in his eyes, and, as if to conceal his emotion, he looked at the watery horizon where it joined the misty line that marked the shore.

“It ’s she,” he said; “she ’s following us!”

“What is it?” called the Spanish captain.

“A ship,” replied the general in an undertone.

“I saw her yesterday,” said Captain Gomez; and he looked at the Frenchman as if to question him. “She has been chasing us all the time,” he added, in the general’s ear.

“And I don’t know why she has n’t overtaken us,” replied the veteran, “for she sails faster than your infernal Saint-Ferdinand.”

“She must have had some accident — sprung a leak, perhaps.”

"She's gaining on us!" cried the Frenchman.

"She's a Colombian pirate," said the captain in his ear. "We are still six leagues from shore, and the wind's dropping."

"She is n't sailing, she's flying, as if she knew that in two hours her prey would escape. What audacity!"

"Audacity!" cried the captain. "Oh! she is n't called the Othello for nothing. Not long ago the fellow sunk a Spanish frigate, and yet he does n't carry more than thirty guns! I was afraid of him, for I knew he was cruising in the West Indies. — Aha!" he continued after a pause, during which he looked up at his own sails, "the wind's springing up again, we shall make the port. We must, for the Parisian would show us no mercy."

"He's making his port, too!" rejoined the marquis.

The Othello was barely three leagues astern. Although the crew had not overheard the conversation between the marquis and Captain Gomez, the appearance of the strange sail had brought most of the sailors and passengers aft toward the spot where the two were standing; but almost all of them, taking the stranger for a merchant vessel, were watching her approach with interest, when a sailor suddenly exclaimed, in forcible language: —

"By Saint-Jacques! We're done for! Here comes the Parisian captain!"

At that fear-inspiring name, there was a panic aboard the brig, and a scene of confusion that words cannot describe. The Spanish captain by his firm words aroused a momentary energy in his sailors; and, in that crisis, wishing to make the land at any cost, he tried to set instantly all his upper sails, and offer to the wind every inch of canvas that his yards would hold. But the work was not done without great difficulty; naturally it lacked the

wonderful unanimity and *ensemble* that are so fascinating to watch on a man-of-war.

Although the Othello flew like a swallow, thanks to the perfect fit and trim of her sails, she seemed to gain so slowly that the unfortunate Frenchmen conceived false hopes. Suddenly, just as the Saint-Ferdinand, after extraordinary efforts, was taking on more speed as a result of the skilful handling of her crew, in which Gomez himself had assisted with voice and action, the steersman, by putting the helm the wrong way, purposely no doubt, threw her into the wind. The sails shook, then the vessel was taken aback; the booms parted, and she was completely disabled.

Indescribable passion made the captain whiter than his sails; with a single bound he threw himself upon the helmsman and attacked him so fiercely with his dagger that he missed him, but threw him into the sea. Then he seized the tiller and tried to repair the horrible havoc that had befallen his gallant craft. Tears of despair gathered in his eyes; for we feel more chagrin at a treacherous act which defeats a result due to our skill, than at the knowledge that death is imminent.

But the more the captain swore, the less progress was made. He himself fired an alarm-gun, hoping to be heard on shore. On the instant, the pirate, coming up with heart-rending rapidity, answered with a shot that fell within ten fathoms of the Saint-Ferdinand.

"Thunder!" cried the general, "how he aims! They must have specially made carronades."

"Oh! when that fellow speaks, you see, other people must keep quiet," said one of the sailors. "The Parisian would n't be afraid of an English vessel."

"It 's all over," cried the captain in a despairing tone,

when, having looked through his telescope, he was unable to distinguish any signs of help from shore. "We are farther from land than I thought."

"Why do you despair?" rejoined the general. "All your passengers are French, and they chartered your vessel. This fellow 's a Parisian, you say? Very good — hoist the French flag, and —"

"And he 'll sink us," the captain replied. "He 's whatever he has to be, according to circumstances, when he proposes to take possession of rich booty."

"Oh! if he 's a pirate —"

"Pirate!" said the old seaman savagely. "Oh! he 's always within the law, or knows how to get there."

"Well," said the general, raising his eyes toward heaven, "let us make the best of it."

And he still had strength to restrain his tears.

Even as he spoke, a second shot, more accurately aimed, buried itself in the hull of the Saint-Ferdinand.

"Heave to!" ordered the captain in a melancholy tone.

And the sailor who had defended the Parisian's gallantry assisted most intelligently in that desperate manœuvre. The crew waited half an hour in utter demoralization. The Saint-Ferdinand had on board four millions in piastres, comprising the fortunes of five of the passengers; and the general's was eleven hundred thousand francs. Finally the Othello, then within easy gun-shot, showed plainly the muzzles of twelve guns ready to open fire. She seemed to be borne onward by a wind that the devil exhaled expressly for her; but the eye of an experienced seaman speedily detected the explanation of her speed. It was enough to observe the brig's extreme length, her narrowness of beam, the height and rake of her masts, the cut of her sails, the wonderful lightness of her spars, and the



ease with which her large crew, working together like a single man, kept the white surface of her sails perfectly trimmed. Everything indicated absolute confidence in her supreme power on the part of that slender creation of wood, as swift and as intelligent as a race-horse or a bird of prey. Her crew were silent, prepared, in case of resistance, to devour the ill-fated merchant vessel, which, luckily for her, kept quiet, like a schoolboy detected in wrong-doing by his teacher.

"We have guns!" cried the general, pressing the Spanish captain's hand.

The latter looked at the old soldier with an expression of desperate courage, and said:—

"And men?"

The general glanced at the crew of the *Saint-Ferdinand*, and shuddered. The four merchants were white as ghosts, and trembling from head to foot; while the sailors, gathered about one of their number, seemed to be concerting measures to ship aboard the *Othello*; they watched the approaching corsair with greedy curiosity. The boatswain, the captain, and the marquis alone exchanged glances eloquent of noble thoughts.

"Ah! Captain Gomez, long ago I bade my country and my family adieu with a heart dead with bitterness; must I leave them again when I am bringing joy and happiness to my children?"

The general turned to cast a frenzied tear into the sea, and spied the helmsman swimming toward the pirate.

"This time," replied the captain, "you must surely bid them adieu forever."

The Frenchman startled the Spaniard by the stupefied glance that he bestowed upon him.

At that moment the two craft were almost side by side;

and at sight of the enemy's crew, the general believed in Gomez's prophecy of doom. Three men stood about each gun. Their athletic posture, their sharp features, their bare, muscular arms, made them resemble bronze statues. Death might have seized them without overthrowing them. Well armed, active, lithe and powerful, they stood motionless at their stations. Their strongly marked faces were tanned by the sun; their eyes shone like so many fiery points and told of vigorous minds and infernal diversions.

The profound silence that reigned upon that deck, black with men and hats, revealed the unbending discipline by which a powerful will subdued those demons in human shape. Their leader stood at the foot of the mainmast, with folded arms, without other weapons than an axe that lay at his feet. On his head, for protection from the sun, was a broad-brimmed hat which concealed his face. Like dogs lying at their master's feet, the gunners and seamen looked alternately at their captain and at the merchant vessel. When the two brigs touched, the shock roused the pirate from his reverie, and he said a word or two in the ear of a young officer who stood within a foot or two of him.

"Boarding-irons!" shouted the lieutenant.

And the *Othello* was made fast to the *Saint-Ferdinand* with marvellous celerity. Following the orders given in an undertone by the pirate and repeated by the lieutenant, the men assigned to each duty, like seminarists marching to mass, swarmed on to the deck of the prize, bound the hands of seamen and passengers, and took possession of the gold. In a moment the boxes filled with piastres, the provisions, and the crew of the *Saint-Ferdinand* were transferred to the deck of the *Othello*.

The general thought that he must be dreaming when he found himself, with his hands tied behind his back, cast upon a bale of merchandise as if he were merchandise himself.

A conference took place between the pirate, his lieutenant, and one of the crew who seemed to fill the office of boatswain. When the discussion, which lasted but a short time, was at an end, the boatswain blew his whistle; in obedience to an order given by him his men rushed aboard the *Saint-Ferdinand*, climbed into her rigging, and set about stripping her of yards, sails, and ropes, as rapidly as a soldier on the battle-field strips the dead body of a comrade whose shoes and cloak he had coveted.

"We are lost," said the Spanish captain coolly to the marquis; he had been watching the gesticulations of the three leaders during their conference, and the agile movements of the sailors as they proceeded methodically to pillage his brig.

"Why so?" queried the marquis.

"What do you suppose they 'll do with us?" replied the Spaniard. "No doubt they realize that they would have difficulty in selling the *Saint-Ferdinand* in a French or Spanish port, and they're going to sink her to get her off their hands. As for us, do you suppose they can burden themselves with our support when they don't know what port to make for?"

The captain had hardly finished speaking when the general heard a horrible outcry followed by the splash of several bodies falling into the sea. He turned and did not see the four merchants. Eight savage-featured gunners still had their arms in the air when the veteran looked at them in dismay.

"What did I tell you?" said the Spanish captain coolly.

The marquis sprang to his feet; the sea was already smooth again and he could not distinguish the spot where his unfortunate fellow travellers had been swallowed up; at that moment they were sinking, bound hand and foot, beneath the waves, if indeed the fishes had not already devoured them. A few steps away the treacherous helmsman and the sailor from the Saint-Ferdinand who had extolled the powers of the Parisian captain were fraternizing with the pirates, and pointing out to them those of the brig's crew whom they deemed worthy to be taken into the crew of the Othello. Two cabin-boys were tying the feet of the others, despite their shocking oaths. The selection duly made, the eight gunners seized the doomed men and tossed them overboard without ceremony. The pirates watched with careless curiosity the different ways in which the men fell, their grimaces, their dying struggles; but their faces betrayed neither mockery, nor surprise, nor pity. To them it was a very simple occurrence, to which they seemed accustomed. The older hands preferred to gaze, with a fixed and gloomy smile, at the boxes filled with piastres at the foot of the mainmast.

The general and Captain Gomez, seated on a bale, consulted each other in silence with an almost lifeless expression. Ere long they were the only survivors of the Saint-Ferdinand's ship's company. The seven sailors chosen by the two traitors from among the crew were already metamorphosed into Peruvians, with great rejoicing.

"What infernal villains!" cried the general suddenly, his honorable and generous indignation putting grief and prudence to flight.

"They obey the law of necessity," said Gomez coolly. "If you should ever fall in with one of yonder fellows, would n't you run your sword through his body?"

"Captain," said the lieutenant, turning to the Spaniard, "the Parisian has heard of you. He says that you 're the only man who is thoroughly acquainted with all the channels and passages of the West Indies, and with the Brazil coast. Will you —"

The captain interrupted the young man with a disdainful gesture, and replied: —

"I will die like a sailor, like a loyal Spaniard, like a Christian — do you understand?"

"Over with him?" cried the young man.

At the word two gunners seized Gomez.

"You are cowards!" cried the general, attempting to stop them.

"Don't get too excited, old fellow," said the lieutenant. "Although your red ribbon seems to have made some impression on our captain, I don't care a damn for it myself. You and I are going to have our bit of conversation in a minute."

As he spoke a loud splash, unaccompanied by any sound of lamentation, told the general that the gallant Gomez had died like a sailor.

"My money or death!" he shrieked, in a horrible outbreak of rage.

"Ah! you are more reasonable," sneered the pirate. "Now you are sure to obtain something from us."

At a sign from the lieutenant two sailors came forward to bind the Frenchman's feet; but he, pushing them back with unlooked-for courage, drew from its scabbard, with a sudden movement that was totally unexpected, the sabre that the lieutenant wore at his side, and began to handle it briskly like an old cavalry officer who knew his trade.

"Ah! you brigands, you sha'n't throw one of Napoleon's old troopers overboard like an oyster!"

Several pistol-shots fired point-blank at the recalcitrant Frenchman attracted the attention of the Parisian, then engaged in overlooking the trans-shipment of the Saint-Ferdinand's spars. Without apparent excitement, he seized the brave general from behind, lifted him, carried him to the vessel's side, and was on the point of throwing him overboard like a condemned spar. At that moment the general met the flaming eye of his daughter's abductor. The father and son-in-law recognized each other instantly. The captain, spinning about in the opposite direction, as if the marquis were as light as a feather, placed him on his feet beside the mainmast instead of tossing him into the sea. A murmur arose on the after-deck; but the pirate turned his glance upon his men, and instantly there was absolute silence.

"This is Hélène's father," said the captain in a loud, distinct voice. "Woe to the man who does n't treat him with respect!"

A roar of joyful acclamation rose from the deck and ascended heavenward like a prayer, like the first strain of the *Te Deum*. The cabin-boys jumped into the rigging, the sailors threw their caps in the air, the gunners stamped on the deck, every one roared and whistled and swore. This fanatical method of expressing pleasure made the general anxious and depressed. Ascribing it to some ghastly mystery, his first words, when he recovered the power of speech, were: "My child! where is she?"

The pirate bestowed upon him one of those glances which, for some reason that no one could divine, always wrought confusion in the most fearless souls; it made him dumb, to the vast satisfaction of the sailors, who were delighted to see their leader's power exerted upon all sorts of people. He led him to a gangway, down the stairs, and to

the door of a stateroom, which he opened quickly, saying:—

“There she is!”

With that he disappeared, leaving the old soldier gazing in utter stupefaction at the picture presented to his eyes.

Hearing the stateroom door opened abruptly, Hélène had risen from the couch upon which she was lying. She saw the marquis and uttered a cry of surprise. She was so changed that only a father's eyes could recognize her. The tropical sun had embellished her sallow face with a rich tinge of brown, which imparted to her features a suggestion of Oriental poesy; and there was an air of grandeur, a majestic firmness of character, a depth of feeling, by which the most vulgar nature could not fail to be impressed. Her long and abundant hair fell in thick curls over her stately neck, and added an element of strength to her haughty countenance. In her attitude, in her movements, Hélène made manifest her consciousness of her power. A triumphant self-contentment inflated slightly her pink nostril, and tranquil happiness was written in every development of her beauty. There was in her aspect the indefinable sweet charm of a virgin and at the same time that sort of pride that is peculiar to women who are dearly loved. Slave and queen at once, she chose to obey because it was in her power to reign.

She was dressed with charming and refined magnificence. Her costume was mainly of Indian muslin; but her couch and its cushions were covered with cashmere, there was a Persian rug on the floor of the spacious cabin, and her four children were playing at her feet, building strange castles with pearl necklaces, precious stones, and valuables of all sorts. Several Sèvres vases, painted by Madame Jaquotot, contained rare flowers which perfumed the air:

there were Mexican jasmine and camellias, among which tame American birds were fluttering, like rubies, sapphires, or living gold.

There was a piano in the cabin, and on its wooden walls, hung with red silk, were scattered pictures, of small dimensions but signed by the greatest painters: a Sunset, by Hippolyte Schinner, hung beside a Terburg; a Virgin, by Raphael, contended for the palm of poetic sentiment with a sketch by Géricault; a Gerard Douw outshone the portrait-painters of the Empire. On a table of Chinese lacquer was a plate heaped high with delicious fruit. In short, Hélène was like the queen of a vast realm in that boudoir where her crowned lover had collected the loveliest things of earth.

The children gazed at their grandfather with eyes of penetrating keenness; and, accustomed as they were to live amid storms, battles, and tumult, they resembled those little Romans eager for war and bloodshed whom David introduced in his painting of Brutus.

"Can it be possible?" cried Hélène, grasping her father's arm as if to assure herself of the reality of the vision.

"Hélène!"

"Father!"

They fell into each other's arms, and the old man's embrace was neither the stronger nor the more affectionate.

"You were on that ship?"

"Yes," he replied sadly, seating himself on the couch, and looking at the children, who had gathered about him and were eying him with artless curiosity. "I should have died but for —"

"But for my husband," she interrupted; "I understand."



"Oh!" cried the general, "why need I find you thus, my Hélène, for whom I have mourned so bitterly? I must continue to lament your fate."

"Why so?" she asked with a smile. "Will you not be glad that I am the happiest of all women?"

"Happy!" he cried, with a gesture of amazement.

"Yes, my dear father," she said, seizing his hands, kissing them, and pressing them to her throbbing heart, — all with a movement of the head which her eyes, sparkling with pleasure, made even more significant.

"How can it be?" he inquired, eager to learn about his daughter's life, and forgetting everything else before that resplendent countenance.

"Listen, father," she said: "my lover, my husband, my servant, my master, is a man whose soul is as vast as this boundless ocean, as fertile in gentleness as heaven — a very god, in short! For seven years, not a word has escaped him, not a sentiment, not a gesture that was not absolutely in accord with the divine harmony of his language, his caresses, and his love. He has never looked at me without a fond smile on his lips and a gleam of joy in his eyes. On deck his thunderous voice often drowns the roar of the storm or the uproar of battle; but here it is as soft and melodious as the music of Rossini, whose works I own. Everything that a woman's whim can devise, I obtain. Sometimes, indeed, my wishes are exceeded. In short, I reign at sea, and I am obeyed as implicitly as a sovereign can be. Happy!" she added, interrupting herself, "happy is not the word to describe my bliss. I have the share of all women! To feel an unbounded love and devotion for the man you love, and to find in his heart, *his*, an infinity of sentiment in which a woman's whole being loses itself, and forever — tell me, is that bliss? I have

already lived a thousand lives. Here I am alone, here I command. Never has any mortal of my sex set foot upon this vessel, where Victor is always within a few steps of me. — He cannot go farther away from me than from the stern to the bow,” she continued with a mischievous expression. “Seven years! a love that endures seven years — such unending joy, such a test at every moment — is that love? No! oh, no! it is better than anything that I ever knew of life. Human language fails to express divine bliss.”

A torrent of tears gushed from her swollen eyes. The four children thereupon set up a plaintive cry, ran to her like chickens to their mother, and the oldest struck the general and gazed at him with a threatening expression.

“Abel, my angel,” she said, “I am crying with joy.”

She took him in her lap, and the child caressed her lovingly, putting his arms about her stately neck, like a lion’s whelp trying to play with its mother.

“Are n’t you ever bored?” said the general, bewildered by his daughter’s reply upon so lofty a key.

“Yes,” she answered, “on shore, when we go ashore; and yet I never leave my husband.”

“But you used to like fêtes and balls and music.”

“His voice is music; my fêtes are the toilets that I devise for his pleasure. When a dress of mine pleases him, it is as if the whole world admired me! That is the only reason that I do not throw into the sea all these diamonds and necklaces and diadems of jewels; all these treasures and flowers and masterpieces of art that he showers upon me, saying: ‘As you don’t go into the world, Hélène, I propose that the world shall come to you.’”

“But there are men on this vessel, reckless, terrible men, whose passions —”

"I understand you, father," she said with a smile. "Have no fear on that score. No empress was ever treated with greater respect and consideration than they lavish on me. These men are superstitious; they think that I am the tutelary genius of this vessel, of their undertakings, of their success. But it is *he* who is their god! One day, only once, a sailor was disrespectful to me — in words," she added, laughing. "Before Victor had had time to hear of it the rest of the crew tossed him overboard, notwithstanding the fact that I had forgiven him. They love me as their good angel, I take care of them in their sicknesses, and I have had the good luck to save some of them from death by nursing them with a woman's perseverance. The poor fellows are giants and children at once."

"And when there is fighting?"

"I am used to it," she replied. "I quaked with fear only during the first one. Now, my mind is accustomed to that danger, indeed — I am your daughter, and I love it."

"And suppose he should die?"

"Then I should die."

"And your children?"

"They are sons of the Ocean and of danger, they share the lives of their parents. Our existences are as one, and cannot be separated. We all live the same life, written on the same page; we are all borne by the same craft, and we know it."

"Do you love him then so dearly that you prefer him to everything else?"

"To everything else," she repeated. "But let us not try to fathom the mystery. Look at this dear child: well, it is *he* over again!"

And, hugging Abel with extraordinary fervor, she devoured his cheeks, his hair with kisses.

"But I shall never be able to forget that he has just ordered nine men thrown into the sea," exclaimed the general.

"It was necessary, no doubt," she rejoined, "for he is humane and generous. He sheds as little blood as is consistent with the safety and the interest of the little company that he has under his protection, and of the sacred cause that he defends. Speak to him of what seems wrong to you, and you will see that he will make you change your mind."

"And his crime?" said the general, as if speaking to himself.

"But suppose," she rejoined with cold dignity, "that it was a virtuous act? Suppose that human justice had failed to avenge him?"

"Should he avenge himself?" cried the general.

"What is hell, pray," she asked, "if not a never-ending vengeance for a few sins of a day?"

"Oh! you are lost! he has bewitched you, perverted you! You are talking nonsense."

"Stay here one day, father, and if you will consent to look at him and listen to him, you will love him."

"Hélène," said the general solemnly, "we are within a few leagues of France."

She started, looked through the porthole, and pointed to boundless rolling plains of green water.

"There is my country," she replied, stamping upon the cabin floor.

"But won't you come to see your mother and brothers and sister?"

"Oh, yes," she said, with tears in her voice, "if he is willing and if he can go with me."

"Have you nothing any longer, then, *Hélène*," said the old soldier sternly; "neither country nor family?"

"I am his wife," she replied proudly, and with an accent of true dignity. "This," she added, seizing her father's hand and kissing it, "is the first joy I have had for seven years that has n't come from him, and the first reproof I have heard in that time."

"And your conscience?"

"My conscience? Why, he is my conscience."

At that moment she gave a sudden start.

"Here he comes," she said. "Even in a battle I can recognize his step on the poop among all the rest."

And suddenly a deep flush suffused her cheeks and made her face glow resplendently and her eyes shine. There was happiness and love in her muscles, in her blue veins, in the involuntary quivering of her whole person. That thrill of delicate sensitiveness impressed the general.

A moment later the pirate entered, sat down in an arm-chair, seized his oldest son, and began to play with him. There was a moment's silence; for during that length of time the general, buried in a reverie not unlike the shadowy emotion of a dream, gazed about that dainty cabin, like a halcyon's nest, in which that family had been sailing the seas for seven years, between sky and waves, on the faith of one man — guided amid the perils of war and storms as a family is guided by its head, in ordinary life, through social calamities. He gazed in admiration at his daughter, the ideal image of a marine goddess, lovely to look upon, rich in happiness, and dimming the splendor of all the treasures that encompassed her by the treasures of her spirit, the brilliancy of her eyes, and the indescribable poesy in her person and all about her.

That condition of affairs was so extraordinary that it took the general completely by surprise. It presented a sublimity of passion, and of common sense as well, that put all conventional ideas to confusion. The unfeeling and prejudiced intrigues of society were as naught before that picture. The old soldier realized it all, and realized too that his daughter would never abandon a life so broad, so fruitful in contrasts, filled with a love so true; moreover, if she had ever encountered danger without being appalled by it, she could not endure to return to the paltry scenes of an insignificant and narrow-minded world.

"Do I intrude?" asked the pirate, breaking the silence, and looking at his wife.

"No," the general replied, "Hélène has told me all. I see that she is lost to us."

"No," rejoined the pirate hastily; "only a few years more, and the law of limitation will enable me to return to France. When the conscience is pure, and a man, in violating your laws, has simply obeyed —"

He stopped, disdaining to justify himself.

"But how can you," the general interrupted, "fail to suffer remorse for the fresh murders that were just committed before your eyes?"

"We had no provisions," replied the pirate coolly.

"But if you had set the men ashore —"

"They would have had our retreat cut off by a war vessel, and we should n't see Chili again."

"Before they could have sent word from France," said the general, "to the naval authorities of Spain —"

"But France might take it ill that a man still under sentence of its assize court, should have seized a brig chartered by men from Bordeaux. Besides, did n't you ever fire a shot or two too many on the battlefield?"

The general, awed by the pirate's glance, held his peace, and his daughter looked at him with an expression half triumph, half melancholy.

"General," said the pirate in a deep voice, "I have made it my law never to take anything out of the booty before division. But there is no question that my share will be larger than your fortune. Allow me to restore it to you in other funds."

He took from the drawer of the piano a mass of bank-notes, and handed a million to the marquis without counting the contents of the packages.

"You will understand," he continued, "that I can't amuse myself looking at passers-by on the road to Bordeaux. Now, unless you are attracted by the perils of our wandering life, by the charms of South America, by our tropical nights, by our battles, and by the pleasure of witnessing the triumph of the flag of a young nation, or of the name of Simon Bolivar, we must part. A boat manned by trustworthy men awaits you. Let us hope for a third meeting more entirely satisfactory."

"Victor, I would like to see my father just a moment more," said Hélène with a pout.

"Ten minutes more may bring us face to face with a frigate. No matter! we will have a little sport. Our people are bored to death."

"Oh! go, father!" cried the seaman's wife. "And take to my sister and brothers and — to my mother," she added, "these pledges of my loving remembrance."

She picked up a handful of precious stones, necklaces, and jewels, wrapped them in a shawl, and timidly handed them to her father.

"And what shall I say to them from you?" he inquired,

apparently impressed by the hesitation H  l  ne had shown before uttering the word "mother."

"Oh! can you doubt my heart? I pray every day for their happiness."

"H  l  ne," rejoined the old man, gazing closely at her, "am I never to see you again? Shall I never know the motive that impelled you to leave us?"

"That secret is not mine," she said gravely. "Even if I had the right to tell it to you, perhaps I should not. For ten years I suffered unheard-of agonies —"

She said no more, but handed her father the gifts intended for her family. The general, accustomed by his experience of warfare to hold broad views on the subject of booty, accepted the presents proffered by his daughter, and found some satisfaction in thinking that, under the inspiration of a character so pure and lofty as H  l  ne's, the Parisian captain continued to be an honorable man, while making war on the Spaniards. His passion for brave men carried the day. Reflecting that it would be absurd to act like a prude, he warmly pressed the pirate's hand, embraced his H  l  ne, his only daughter, with the effusiveness peculiar to soldiers, and dropped a tear on that face, whose proud and resolute expression had many a time aroused his admiration.

The seaman, deeply moved, gave him his children to bless. At last they bade one another adieu with a long gaze which was by no means devoid of emotion.

"May you always be happy!" cried the grandfather, darting to the deck.

On the water a strange sight awaited the general. The Saint-Ferdinand, aflame from stem to stern, was blazing like an immense heap of straw. The sailors, while engaged in scuttling the Spanish brig, noticed that she had



a quantity of rum on board, a liquor that was very plentiful aboard the Othello; and it seemed to them an excellent jest to light a huge bowl of punch in mid-ocean. The diversion was pardonable enough in men who were led by the monotony of life at sea to seize every occasion to enliven it.

As he went down the side of the Othello, into the Saint-Ferdinand's gig, manned by six stalwart sailors, the general involuntarily divided his attention between the blazing Saint-Ferdinand and his daughter leaning on her husband's arm at the stern of their craft. With so many memories pouring into his mind, when he saw Hélène's white dress floating in the air like an additional sail, and watched that tall and graceful figure, so imposing that it dominated everything, even the ocean, he forgot, with a true soldier's heedlessness, that he was sailing over the grave of the gallant Gomez. Above him an enormous column of smoke hovered like a dim cloud, and the sun's rays, breaking through it here and there, diffused tiny poetic gleams. It was like a second sky, a dark dome with a sort of stars shining beneath, while above stretched the unchangeable blue of the firmament, which seemed a thousand times more beautiful by virtue of that momentary contrast. The strange hues of that smoke, now yellow, now red, and now black, and anon all three at once, covered the brig, which crackled and snapped and shrieked. The flames whistled as they licked the ropes and ran through the vessel as a popular uprising flies through a city's streets. The rum made a blue flame that quivered as if the demon of the seas were stirring the frantic liquor, as a student's hand stirs the merry *flamberie* of a well-brewed punch in a debauch. But the sun, with its more powerful light, jealous of that audacious gleam, barely allowed the colors of the

conflagration to be seen amid its beams. It was like a reed, like a scarf fluttering in the torrent of the solar rays.

The Othello made the most of what little wind she could find, to fly on her new course, and lay over, now on this side, now on the other, like a kite skimming through the air. The rakish craft was beating to the southward, and at times she disappeared from the general's sight behind the column of smoke which cast a fantastic shadow on the waters, and again appeared, rising gracefully to the seas and rapidly receding. Every time that H  l  ne could make out her father, she waved her handkerchief once more.

In a few moments the Saint-Ferdinand sank, producing a commotion on the surface that speedily disappeared. And all that remained of that scene was a cloud floating in the breeze. The Othello was far away; the gig was drawing near the shore; the cloud interposed between that fragile craft and the distant brig. The last time that the general saw his daughter was through a rift in that undulating smoke. A prophetic vision! The white handkerchief, the dress, alone stood out against that bistre sea. The brig could not be distinguished between the green water and the blue sky. H  l  ne was simply an almost imperceptible point, a slender graceful line, an angel in the sky, an idea, a memory.

Having recovered his fortune, the marquis died, worn out with fatigue. A few months after his death, in 1833, the marchioness was obliged to take Mo  na to the Pyrenees to take the waters. The capricious child insisted upon seeing the beautiful spots in those mountains. She returned to the baths, and on her return this shocking scene occurred.

"Dear me, mother," said Mo  na, "we were foolish not to

stay in the mountains a few days longer! We were much more comfortable there than here. Did you hear that infernal brat's everlasting groans, and the chatter of that wretched woman, who must talk some dialect, for I did n't understand a single word she said? What sort of people have they given us for neighbors? Last night was one of the ghastliest nights I ever passed in my life."

"I did n't hear anything," the marchioness replied; "but I 'll see the landlady, my dear child, and ask her for the next room, so that we shall be alone in this suite; then we shall have no more noise. How do you feel this morning? Are you tired?"

As she spoke, the marchioness rose to walk to Moïna's bed.

"Let us see," she said, feeling for her daughter's hand.

"Oh! let me alone, mother," said Moïna; "you 're cold."

With that, the girl turned over sulkily on her pillow; but the movement was so graceful that it was hard for a mother to be angry. At that moment, a groan, soft and prolonged, of the sort to tear a woman's heart, arose in the next room.

"Why did n't you wake me if you heard that all night? We would have —"

A deeper groan than the others interrupted the marchioness, who exclaimed: —

"There 's some one dying in there!"

And she hurried from the room.

"Send Pauline to me," cried Moïna; "I 'm going to dress."

The marchioness hastened downstairs and found the landlady in the courtyard surrounded by several persons who seemed to be listening attentively to her.

"Madame, you have put in the room next ours a person who seems to be in great pain —"

"Oh! don't speak of it!" cried the hostess; "I'm going to send for the mayor. Imagine that it's a woman, a poor wretch who arrived here last night, on foot; she's from Spain, and she has n't any passport or any money. She carried on her back a little child, who is dying. I could n't refuse to take her in. This morning I went up to see her myself, for when she got here last night she gave me a horrid shock. Poor little woman! she was in bed with her child, and both of them fighting against death. 'Madame,' she says, taking a ring from her finger, 'this is all I've got left; take it to pay you; it'll be enough, for I sha'n't make a long stay here. Poor darling! we are going to die together!' she says, looking at her child. I took her ring and asked her who she was; but she would n't tell me her name. I've just sent for the doctor and the mayor."

"I beg you," cried the marchioness, "to see that she has whatever she most requires. Mon Dieu! perhaps there is still time to save her! I will pay whatever you may spend."

"Ah! madame, she acts as if she was pretty proud, and I don't know whether she'll consent."

"I will go up and see her."

And the marchioness instantly went up to the stranger's room, not thinking of the harmful effect that her sudden appearance might have upon the woman, who was said to be dying; for she was still in mourning. The marchioness turned pale at the aspect of the dying woman. Despite the horrible sufferings that had sadly changed H  l  ne's lovely face, Madame d'Aiglemont recognized her eldest daughter.

At sight of a woman dressed in black Hélène sat up in bed with a shriek of terror, then sank back slowly, when, in that woman, she recognized her mother.

"My child!" cried Madame d'Aiglemont, "what would you like? — Pauline! Moïna!"

"I want nothing now," replied Hélène, in a feeble voice. "I hoped to see my father again, but your mourning tells me —"

She did not finish, but pressed her child to her heart as if to warm him, kissed his forehead, and flashed a glance at her mother in which reproach could still be read, albeit softened by forgiveness.

The marchioness refused to see the reproach; she forgot that Hélène was a child conceived in tears and despair, the child of duty, a child who had been the cause of her greatest misery. She walked gently toward her eldest daughter, remembering only that Hélène had first made known to her the joys of maternity. The mother's eyes were full of tears, and as she embraced Hélène, she cried: —

"O Hélène! my child!"

Hélène said nothing. She had just inhaled her child's last breath.

At this moment Moïna, Pauline, her maid, the landlady, and a doctor entered. The marchioness held her daughter's ice-cold hand in hers and gazed at her in genuine despair. Exasperated by unhappiness, the pirate's widow, who had narrowly escaped shipwreck, and had been able to save but one child of all her beautiful family, said to her mother in a horrible voice: —

"All this is your work! If you had been to me what —"

"Go out, Moïna! go out, all of you!" cried Madame d'Aiglemont, drowning Hélène's voice with her own.

"In heaven's name, my child," she added, "let us not at this moment renew our former pitiable battles."

"I will keep silent," said Hélène, with a superhuman effort. "I am a mother: I know that Moïna should not — Where is my child?"

Moïna returned, led by curiosity.

"Sister," said that spoiled child, "the doctor —"

"Nothing's of any use," said Hélène. "Oh! why did n't I die at sixteen, when I tried to kill myself! Happiness is not to be found outside of the law. Moïna, you —"

She died, bending her head over her child's, and embracing him convulsively.

"Your sister meant to say to you, no doubt, Moïna," said Madame d'Aiglemont after they had returned to their room, where she burst into tears, "that a girl never finds happiness in a romantic life, outside of received ideas, and, above all, away from her mother."

## VI.

## THE OLD AGE OF A GUILTY MOTHER.

DURING one of the first days of June, 1844, a lady of about fifty, who seemed older, however, than her actual age justified, was walking in the sunshine, at noon, on a path in the garden of a large house on rue Plumet, Paris. After she had twice or thrice walked the whole length of the slightly winding path, where she remained in order to keep her eye on the windows of an apartment by which her entire attention seemed absorbed, she seated herself on one of those semi-rustic chairs which are made of the branches of young trees with the bark on. From this position of the chair the lady could command, through one of the gates in the garden fence, both the inner boulevards where the wonderful dome of the Invalides rears its gold cupola aloft amid the heads of innumerable elms (a beautiful prospect), and the less imposing aspect of her own garden, bounded by the gray façade of one of the finest mansions of Faubourg Saint-Germain. There everything was silent — the neighboring gardens, the boulevards, the Invalides; for in that aristocratic quarter the day hardly begins before noon. Unless through some whim, unless a young lady desires to ride, or an old diplomatist has a protocol to redraft, everybody — servants and masters — is asleep at that hour, or is just waking.

The early-rising old lady was the Marquise d'Aiglemont, mother of Madame de Saint-Héreen, to whom the fine

house belonged. The marchioness had parted with it to her daughter, to whom she had given her whole fortune, reserving only an annuity for herself.

Comtesse Moïna de Saint-Héreen was Madame d'Aiglemont's last child. To enable her to marry the heir of one of the most illustrious families of France, the marchioness had sacrificed everything. Nothing could be more natural: she had lost both her sons: Gustave, Marquis d'Aiglemont, had died of cholera, and Abel had fallen before Constantine. Gustave left a widow and children. But Madame d'Aiglemont's rather lukewarm affection for her sons had become even less enthusiastic when transmitted to her grandchildren. She was perfectly courteous in her treatment of Madame d'Aiglemont the younger; but she confined herself to the superficial sentiments that good taste and social conventions bid us manifest to our neighbors.

As the fortunes of her deceased children were unimpaired, she had reserved her own property and her savings for her dear Moïna. Moïna, lovely and fascinating from childhood, had always been the object, on Madame d'Aiglemont's part, of one of those preferences which are innate or involuntary in mothers; which sometimes seem inexplicable, and which sometimes observers are only too well able to explain. Moïna's charming face, the tones of her voice, her manners, her bearing, her expression, everything about that beloved child, awoke in the marchioness the most profound emotions that can animate, perturb, or delight a mother's heart. The mainspring of her present life, of her life thereafter, of her past life, was in that girl's heart, into which she had cast all her treasures.

Moïna had, by good fortune, survived four children all older than she. Madame d'Aiglemont had, indeed, lost in the most deplorable way (so it was whispered in society)



a charming daughter, whose fate was practically unknown, and a little boy, taken from her at five years by a shocking accident. The marchioness recognized doubtless a presage from heaven in the respect that fate seemed to entertain for the child of her heart, and bestowed only faint regrets on her other children who had fallen by the wayside according to the caprice of Death, and who remained in the depths of her heart, like the tombs erected on a battle-field which are almost hidden by wild flowers.

Society might have called the marchioness sternly to account for such favoritism and such indifference; but in Paris society is hurried on by such a torrent of events, of fashions, of new ideas, that Madame d'Aiglemont's whole life was certain to be, in a sense, forgotten. No one thought of imputing to her as a crime a lack of sentiment, a forgetfulness, in which nobody was interested; whereas her ardent affection for Moïna interested many people and had all the sanctity of a prejudice. Besides, the marchioness went little into society; and to most of the families that knew her she seemed a sweet, kindly, devout, indulgent person. Now, one must have, must one not, a very keen interest in a subject to go beyond those appearances with which society is content? And what do we not forgive elderly folk when they efface themselves like ghosts, and are willing to be simply memories!

In short, Madame d'Aiglemont was complacently held up as a model by children to their fathers, by sons-in-law to their mothers-in-law. She had prematurely given her property to Moïna, content with the young countess's good fortune, and living only for her and through her. If prudent old men, if sardonic uncles, criticised her conduct, saying: "Madame d'Aiglemont will be sorry, perhaps, some day, that she made over all her fortune to

her daughter, for even if she does know Madame de Saint-Héreen's heart thoroughly, can she be equally sure of her son-in-law's moral principle?" there was a general outcry against such prophets of evil, and eulogies of Moïna rained down on all sides.

"We must do Madame de Saint-Héreen justice to this extent," said one young woman, "that Madame d'Aiglemont has n't found any change in her surroundings. She has a beautiful apartment, she has a carriage at her service, and can go anywhere on earth, just as before."

"Except to the Italiens," replied in an undertone an old parasite, one of those people who deem themselves entitled to overwhelm their friends with epigrams on the pretext of making a show of independence. "The dowager cares for nothing but music, which is one of the things that her spoiled child knows nothing about. The old lady was such a fine musician in her day! But, as the countess's box is always swarming with young butterflies, and as her mother would be in the way of that young person, who is already spoken of as a great flirt, the poor woman never goes to the Italiens."

"Madame de Saint-Héreen," observed a marriageable young lady, "has lovely evening parties for her mother — a salon frequented by all Paris."

"A salon where nobody pays any attention to the marchioness," retorted the parasite.

"The fact is that Madame d'Aiglemont is never alone," said a fop, supporting the faction of the young wives.

"In the morning," said the old fellow, "dear Moïna's asleep. At four o'clock dear Moïna's at the Bois. In the evening, dear Moïna goes to a ball or to the Bouffes. But it's true that Madame d'Aiglemont has the opportunity to see her dear daughter while she's dressing, or during

dinner when dear Moïna happens to dine with her dear mother. It is n't a week yet, monsieur," he continued, taking by the arm a shy young tutor, a new-comer at the house where this conversation took place, "that I saw that poor mother sitting alone and melancholy in her chimney-corner. 'What's the matter?' I asked her. The marchioness looked at me with a smile, but she had certainly been weeping. 'I was thinking,' she said, 'that it's very strange to be all alone, after having five children; but such is our destiny! And then, too, I am happy when I know that Moïna's enjoying herself!' She could confide in me, because I used to know her husband. He was a poor man, and he was very lucky to have her for a wife; he certainly owed his peerage to her, and his place in Charles the Tenth's court."

But so many errors slip into the ordinary conversations of society, and such far-reaching evil is done from utter heedlessness, that the historian of manners is obliged to weigh shrewdly the statements recklessly made by such a multitude of reckless talkers. Indeed, it may well be that we should never undertake to decide between a mother and her child, which is in the wrong and which in the right. Between those two hearts there is but one possible judge. That judge is God! God who often plants his vengeance in the bosom of a family, and unceasingly makes use of children against mothers, fathers against sons, nations against kings, princes against peoples, of everything against everything else; replacing, in the moral world, sentiments by other sentiments, as the young leaves expel the old ones in the spring; acting in accordance with an unchangeable order, pursuing an end known to Him alone. Doubtless everything goes hence to His bosom, or, rather, returns thither.

Such religious thoughts as these, which occur so naturally to the old, floated about in Madame d'Aiglemont's mind; sometimes they shone brightly there, sometimes they were buried out of sight, sometimes entirely unfolded, like flowers on the surface of the water during a gale. She had seated herself, weary, enfeebled by a long meditation, by one of those reveries in which their whole life is unrolled before the eyes of those who have a presentiment of death.

That woman, old before her time, would have made an interesting picture to a poet happening to pass on the boulevard. Seeing her seated in the sparse shade of an acacia, — the shade of an acacia at noon, — any one would have been able to read some of the many things written on that face, pale and cold as it was even in the hot beams of the sun. Her expressive countenance disclosed something even more solemn than a human life in its decline, something more profound than a spirit worn out by experience. It was one of those faces which, among a thousand that you pass unnoticed, arrest your attention a moment and cause you to reflect; just as, among the thousand and one pictures in a gallery, you are profoundly impressed, it may be, by the sublime face upon which Murillo has depicted maternal grief, or by the face of Beatrice Cenci, whereon Guido had the art to depict the most moving innocence at the heart of the most shocking of crimes, or by the gloomy features of Philip IV, upon which Velasquez has imprinted for all time the majestic terror that royalty should inspire. Certain human faces are despotic images that speak to you, question you, respond to your secret thoughts, and even form complete poems. Madame d'Aiglemont's rigid countenance was one of those awe-inspiring poems, one of the faces scattered by thousands through the *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri.

During the brief period of a woman's bloom, the characteristics of her beauty are wonderfully propitious to the dissimulation that her natural weakness and our social laws force upon her. Behind the rich coloring of her rosy cheeks, behind the fire of her eyes, beneath the charming network of her delicate features, of that multitude of lines, straight or curved, but pure and perfectly defined, all her emotions may remain unrevealed; the sudden flush discloses nothing, for it simply intensifies colors that are already so bright; all the inward fires blend so perfectly with the light of those eyes flaming with life, that the passing gleam evoked by a sharp pang appears simply as an added charm. So that nothing is so discreet as a youthful face, because nothing can be more placid. A young woman's face has the tranquillity, the smoothness, the freshness of the surface of a lake. In truth, a woman's physiognomy does not really begin before she is thirty. Before that age the painter finds in their faces only pinks and whites, smiles and expressions which repeat the same thought, a thought of youth and love, an unvarying and superficial thought. But in old age, a woman's whole being has spoken; the passions have carved themselves upon her face; she has been sweetheart, wife, mother; the most violent emotions of joy and sorrow have at length discolored and distorted her features, by inscribing themselves thereon in numberless wrinkles, each of which has its language; and a woman's face becomes thereupon sublimely ugly, lovely with melancholy, or superbly calm. If we may be permitted to pursue this curious metaphor, the dry lake then shows the marks of all the torrents that originally formed it; an old woman's face no longer belongs either to society, which, being essentially frivolous, is dismayed to see thereon the ruins of all the ideas of elegance

to which it is accustomed, nor to commonplace artists, who discover nothing thereon, but to the true poets, to those who have the sentiment of the beautiful independent of all the conventions upon which rest so many prejudices in relation to art and beauty.

Although Madame d'Aiglemont wore a hood of the style then in vogue, it was easy to see that her hair, once black, had been turned white by painful emotion; but the way in which she parted it in two *bandeaux* showed her excellent taste, disclosed the engaging habits of the refined woman, and outlined perfectly her worn and wrinkled brow, upon which could be traced some signs of its former splendor. The shape of her face, the regularity of her features, gave one an idea — a feeble idea, in truth — of the beauty of which she must once have been proud; but those same tokens were even more eloquent of the suffering that had been sharp enough to ravage that face, to wither the temples, to hollow the cheeks, to redden the eyelids, and to strip them of their lashes, which give charm to the glance.

Everything about her was quiet: her gait and all her movements had the grave and thoughtful moderation which compels respect. Her modesty, now changed to timidity, seemed to be the result of the habit that she had fallen into of late years, of effacing herself before her daughter. Her words, too, were rare and gentle, like those of all persons who are compelled to reflect, to concentrate their thoughts, to live within themselves. That attitude and that countenance aroused an indefinable sentiment, which was neither fear nor compassion, but in which were mysteriously blended all the ideas that those two widely differing sentiments evoke. The nature of her wrinkles, the way in which her face was creased, the pallor of her

pain-ridden glance, all bore eloquent witness to those tears which, being consumed by the heart, never fall to the earth. The unhappy, who are accustomed to look up to Heaven and appeal to it from the ills of life, would easily have recognized in that mother's eyes the painful habit of praying every instant of the day, and the faint traces of those secret wounds which end by destroying the fairest flowers of the heart, even the sentiment of maternity.

Painters have colors for such portraits, but ideas and words are powerless to draw them faithfully: in the tones of the complexion, in the expression of the face, there are inexplicable phenomena which the mind grasps through the eyes; but a recital of the events, to which such terrible transformations of the features are due, is the only means that the poet has to make them intelligible.

The marchioness's face denoted a tempest, outwardly calm and reserved, — a secret combat between the heroism of maternal grief and the infirmity of our feelings, which are finite like ourselves, and in which there is nothing of infinity. Her suffering, thus constantly kept out of sight, had made her morbid to a greater or less degree. Doubtless some too violent emotion had impaired that maternal heart physically, and some disease — an aneurism perhaps — was slowly undermining her health, unknown to her. Genuine suffering is in appearance so calm in the deep bed it has made for itself, in which it seems to sleep, while it continues to corrode the whole being like the terrible acid that eats glass!

At that moment tears were rolling down Julie's cheeks, and she sprang to her feet, as if some thought, more painful than all those that had gone before, had wounded her to the quick. Doubtless she had had a prevision of Moïna's future; and, as she thought of the sorrows that

awaited her daughter, all the miseries of her own life fell anew with crushing weight upon her heart.

This unhappy mother's position will be better understood when we have described the daughter's.

The Comte de Saint-Héreen had left France on a political mission some six months before. During his absence Moïna, who possessed, in addition to all the petty vanities of a mere woman of fashion, the capricious fancies of a spoiled child, had amused herself, either heedlessly or in obedience to a woman's innumerable coquettish whims, by playing with the passion of a shrewd but heartless man, who declared that he was intoxicated with love, with that love of which all the trivial ambitions, social and vain-glorious, of the coxcomb form a large part.

Madame d'Aiglemont who had learned by long experience to appreciate life and men at their true value, and to distrust the world, had watched the progress of this intrigue, and foresaw her daughter's ruin when she should have fallen completely into the hands of a man to whom nothing was sacred. There was something terrible to her in finding that the man to whom Moïna listened with pleasure was a finished *roué*. Her beloved child stood on the brink of a precipice. She had a ghastly certainty of it, yet dared not stay her, for she was mortally afraid of her. She knew beforehand that Moïna would listen to none of her wise warnings; she had no power over that heart, which was of iron to her and as soft as putty to others. Her affection would have led her to feel a sympathetic interest in the mishaps of a passion justified by the seducer's noble qualities; but her daughter was obeying a coquettish impulse; and the marchioness despised Comte Alfred de Vandenesse, knowing that he was a man who would look upon his contest with Moïna as upon a game of chess.



Although Alfred de Vandenesse was an object of aversion to that unhappy mother, she was obliged to bury in the deepest recesses of her heart the controlling reasons for her aversion. She was on the most intimate terms with the Marquis de Vandenesse, Alfred's father, and that friendship, which was eminently proper in the eyes of the world, authorized the young man to frequent Madame de Saint-Héreen's house as a friend of the family, pretending to entertain for the countess a passion conceived in childhood. Moreover, it would have been of no avail if Madame d'Aiglemont could have determined to cast between her daughter and Alfred de Vandenesse a terrible assertion which should part them forever; she was sure that she would not succeed, despite the momentousness of that assertion, which would have dishonored her in her daughter's eyes. Alfred was too corrupt, Moïna too intelligent, to credit such a revelation, and the young countess would have thrown it off by calling it a mother's stratagem. Madame d'Aiglemont had built her dungeon with her own hands, and had walled herself therein, to die watching Moïna's beautiful life go to ruin — that life which had become her glory, her joy, and her consolation; a life which was a thousand times dearer to her than her own. Horrible, incredible, indescribable torture! a bottomless abyss!

She was impatiently waiting for her daughter to rise, and yet she dreaded the moment; like the wretch condemned to death who longs to have done with life yet turns cold when he thinks of the headsman. The marchioness had determined to make one last effort; but she was less afraid, perchance, of failing in her attempt, than of receiving another of those wounds, so agonizing to her heart that they had exhausted all her courage. Her mother-love

had reached this point: she loved her daughter, feared her, dreaded a dagger-stroke, yet went forward. The maternal sentiment is so boundless in loving hearts, that before becoming indifferent a mother must either die or lean upon some greater power — religion or love.

Since she had risen, the marchioness's pitiless memory had revived several of those incidents which, trivial as they may seem, are momentous events in the moral life. In truth, sometimes a mere gesture unrolls a whole drama, the tone in which a word is spoken tears a whole life to tatters, the indifference of a glance kills the most ecstatic passion. The Marquise d'Aiglemont, unhappily, had seen too many of such gestures, heard too many of such words, received too many of such heart-torturing glances, for her memories to offer her any hope. Everything tended to convince her that Alfred had robbed her of her place in her daughter's heart, where the thought of her, the mother, had become rather a duty than a source of pleasure. A thousand things, even mere trifles, bore witness to the countess's detestable conduct toward her — an exhibition of ingratitude which the marchioness regarded perhaps as a punishment. She sought excuses for her daughter in the designs of Providence, in order that she might continue to adore the hand that smote her.

During this morning she remembered everything, and everything wounded her to the heart anew, and so poignantly that her cup, filled to the brim with grief, would overflow if the slightest additional pang were thrown therein. A cold glance might be the death of the marchioness.

It is difficult to describe these domestic incidents, but a few will suffice, perhaps, to give an idea of them all. For instance, the marchioness, having grown a little deaf, had

never been able to induce Moïna to raise her voice for her; and one day when, with the instinctive naïveté of an invalid, she asked her daughter to repeat a sentence of which she had not heard a word, the young woman complied, but with an ill grace that forbade her mother to repeat her modest request. From that day, whenever Moïna was speaking, the marchioness was careful to go near to her; but often the countess seemed annoyed by the infirmity for which she heedlessly blamed her mother.

This example — one out of a thousand — could wound no heart but a mother's. And perhaps all such things might have escaped the eye of an observer; for there were *nuances* of conduct undiscernible to any eyes but a woman's.

For instance, Madame d'Aiglemont having told her daughter one day that the Princesse de Cadignan had called on her, Moïna exclaimed simply: "What! she came to see *you*!" The tone in which the words were said, the accent that the countess gave to them, expressed with the lightest touch an amazement, a refined scorn, which would have led hearts still young and affectionate to regard as truly philanthropic the custom by virtue of which some savage tribes kill their old people when they cannot cling to the branch of a tree that is violently shaken. Madame d'Aiglemont rose with a smile, and went away to weep in secret.

Well-bred people, especially women, never betray their feelings save by imperceptible touches, which, however, are none the less effective in making the throbbing of their hearts visible to those who can find in their past lives crises analogous to that of this sorely wounded mother. Overwhelmed by her recollections, Madame d'Aiglemont recalled one of those microscopic incidents, so stinging

and so painful, wherein she had never seen more clearly than at this moment the pitiless contempt often hidden behind a smile. But her tears dried when she heard the blinds drawn in the room where her daughter slept. She hastened toward the windows by the path that ran by the gate near which she had been sitting a moment before. As she passed she noticed the special pains that the gardener had taken in raking the gravel of the path, which had been poorly kept of late.

When Madame d'Aiglemont came under her daughter's windows, the blinds were abruptly closed again.

"Moïna!" she called.

No reply.

"Madame la comtesse is in the small salon," said Moïna's maid, when the marchioness, having gone into the house, asked if her daughter had risen.

Madame d'Aiglemont's heart was too full and her mind too preoccupied at that moment to reflect upon such trivial details: she went quickly into the small salon, where she found the countess in her *peignoir*, a cap tossed carelessly on her dishevelled hair, her feet in slippers, and with the key of her bedroom in her girdle; her face was flushed and bore the impress of stormy thoughts. She was seated on a couch, and was apparently reflecting profoundly.

"Why am I disturbed?" she demanded in a harsh voice. "Oh! it's you, mother," she added with a distraught expression.

"Yes, my child, it's your mother."

The tone in which Madame d'Aiglemont uttered the words indicated an outpouring of affection and a heartfelt emotion of which it would be difficult to convey an idea without using the word "sanctity." She had, in truth, so effectively clothed herself in the sacred character of

a mother that her daughter was impressed, and turned toward her with an instinctive gesture which expressed respect, uneasiness, and remorse, all at once.

The marchioness closed the door of the salon, which no one could enter without a premonitory noise in the adjoining room; so that they were secure against intrusion.

"My child," said the marchioness, "it is my duty to enlighten you concerning one of the most momentous crises in a woman's life, at which you have arrived, perhaps unknowingly, but of which I have come to talk with you less as a mother than as a friend. When you married you became mistress of your own acts, you are accountable for them to your husband and to no one else; but I imposed my maternal authority upon you so little, — and I made a mistake, perhaps, in that, — that I feel that I have a right to make you listen to me, once at least, in this serious condition of affairs in which you surely need advice. Remember, Moïna, that I married you to a man of eminent talents, of whom you may well be proud; that —"

"Mother," exclaimed Moïna, interrupting her testily, "I know what you are going to say. You are going to preach to me on the subject of Alfred."

"You would not guess so quickly, Moïna," rejoined the marchioness gravely, trying to hold back her tears, "if you did not feel —"

"What?" she demanded, almost haughtily. "Upon my word, mother —"

"Moïna," cried Madame d'Aiglemont, making a superhuman effort, "you must listen carefully to what it is my duty to say to you."

"I am listening," said the countess, folding her arms and assuming an impertinent air of resignation. "Allow me,

mother," she added, with incredible *aplomb*, "to ring for Pauline in order to send her away."

She rang.

"My dear child, Pauline cannot hear."

"Mamma," replied the countess with a serious expression which must have seemed most extraordinary to her mother, "I must —"

She stopped, for the maid entered the room.

"Pauline, go *yourself* to Baudran's and find out why I have n't my hat yet."

She sat down again and gazed steadfastly at her mother. The marchioness, whose heart was swollen to bursting, although her eyes were dry, and who was in the grasp of one of those paroxysms of emotion, the agony of which can be understood only by mothers, set about enlightening Moïna as to the risk she was running. But, whether because the countess was hurt by her mother's suspicions concerning the son of the Marquis de Vandenesse, or because she was attacked by one of the incomprehensible fits of madness, the secret of which lies in the inexperience of youth, she took advantage of a pause made by her mother to say to her with a forced laugh: —

"I thought, mamma, that you were jealous only of his father."

At that stab Madame d'Aiglemont closed her eyes, hung her head, and heaved the faintest of all possible sighs. She looked up into the air, as if in obedience to the invincible impulse that causes us to invoke God's help in the great crises of life; then she turned upon her daughter eyes filled with awe-inspiring majesty, and, likewise, with profound sorrow.

"My child," she said in a strangely altered voice, "you have been more pitiless to your mother than the

man she insulted was, — more so than God will be, I trust !”

She rose ; but on reaching the door she turned, and seeing only blank amazement in her daughter’s eyes, left the room, and succeeded in reaching the garden, where her strength failed her. Attacked by sharp pains at the heart she fell upon a bench. Her eyes, wandering over the gravel of the path, detected the recent print of a man’s foot, whose boots had left unmistakable marks. Beyond doubt her daughter was lost ; she understood the commission given to Pauline. That painful thought was accompanied by a revelation more heart-sickening than all the rest. She assumed that the son of the Marquis de Vandenesse had destroyed in Moïna’s heart the respect that a child owes its mother. Her pain grew worse, she lost consciousness gradually, and lay as if sleeping.

The young countess felt that her mother had taken the liberty to rap her knuckles rather sharply, and thought that a caress or a trifling attention or two in the evening would be all that was necessary to effect a reconciliation. Hearing a woman’s shriek in the garden, she went to the window and looked out with an indifferent air just as Pauline, who had not gone, was calling for help, holding the marchioness in her arms.

“Don’t frighten my daughter !” were the last words that wretched mother uttered.

Moïna saw them bringing her mother in, pale as death, breathing with difficulty, but throwing her arms about as if she were trying to fight or to speak. Struck speechless by that sight, Moïna followed her mother, assisted silently in laying her on her bed and in undressing her. Her misconduct crushed her. At that supreme moment she knew her mother as she was, and could do nothing to atone. She

wished to be alone with her; and when there was no one else in the room, and she felt the deathly chill of that hand that had always had a caress for her, she burst into tears.

Aroused by her weeping the marchioness was able to gaze once more at her darling Moïna; and when she heard the sobs which seemed to be trying to shatter that delicate and disordered bosom, she smiled as she looked at her. That smile convinced the young matricide that a mother's heart is an abyss at the bottom of which there is always forgiveness.

As soon as the marchioness's condition was known, mounted servants were despatched in quest of Madame d'Aiglemont's physician, surgeon, and grandchildren. The young marchioness and her children arrived simultaneously with the professional men, and formed quite an imposing assemblage, silent and anxious, in which the servants mingled.

The young marchioness, who had heard no details, knocked softly at the bedroom door. At that signal, Moïna, aroused evidently in the midst of her sorrow, threw the door wide open, revealed herself in a state of disorder which spoke louder than words, and gazed with haggard eyes over that family party. At sight of that living remorse, every one remained mute. They could plainly see the marchioness's feet lying rigid on the bed of death.

Moïna leaned against the door, glared at her kinsfolk, and exclaimed in a hollow voice: —

“I have lost my mother!”



**MASSIMILLA DONI.**

TO JACQUES STRUNZ.

MY DEAR STRUNZ: — It would be ungrateful in me not to attach your name to one of the two works which I could not have written without your patient good-nature and your kindly assistance. Pray find herein, therefore, a proof of my grateful affection for the courage with which you tried, vainly, I fear, to instruct me in the profundities of the science of music. At all events, you will have taught me all of the obstacles and labor that genius keeps out of sight in those poems which are to us the source of celestial pleasure. You have also afforded me more than once the trifling amusement of a hearty laugh at the expense of a pretended connoisseur. Some accuse me of ignorance, having no suspicion either of the advice for which I am indebted to one of the most accomplished critics of musical works, or of your conscientious assistance. Perhaps I have been the most faithless of secretaries. If that were so, I should certainly be, unconsciously, a treacherous translator, and yet it is my wish always to be able to call myself a friend of yours.

DE BALZAC.

## MASSIMILLA DONI.

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### I.

As connoisseurs know, the Venetian nobility is the most ancient in Europe. Its Book of Gold antedates the Crusade, a time when Venice, the last remnant of Imperial and Christian Rome, Venice, which plunged into the water to escape the barbarians, was already powerful and illustrious, and dominated the whole political and commercial world.

With a few exceptions, that nobility is to-day entirely destroyed. Among the gondoliers who serve English travellers, — to whom history there reveals their future, — there are descendants of former doges whose families are more ancient than those of many sovereigns. If you go to Venice, you will gaze in admiration at some sublimely beautiful maiden standing on a bridge under which your gondola passes, — a girl wretchedly clad, a destitute child who belongs, it may be, to one of the most illustrious patrician stocks. When a race of kings has come to this, there must inevitably be some strange characters among them. There is nothing extraordinary in the occasional gleaming of a spark among embers.

Being intended simply to justify the strangeness of the characters introduced in this tale, these reflections will be carried no further, for there is nothing more insufferable than the repetitions of people who prattle about

Venice after so many great poets and so many small travellers. The interest of the story demanded simply that attention should be directed to the most startling contrast in the existence of mankind: that grandeur and that destitution which are seen in Venice in the establishments of certain great men as well as among the majority of the inhabitants.

The nobles of Venice and of Genoa, like the nobles of Poland before them, assumed no titles. To be called Quirini, Doria, Brignoli, Morosini, Sauli, Mocenigo, Fieschi, Cornaro, or Spinola, was enough for the loftiest pride. All things become corrupted, and some families are titled to-day. Nevertheless, in the days when the nobles of the aristocratic republics were all equal, there was at Genoa a princely title in the family of Doria, which possessed Amalfi in sovereignty, and a similar title at Venice, justified by an ancient domain of Facino Cane, Prince of Varese. The Grimaldis, who became sovereigns, took possession of Monaco much later. The last of the Canes of the elder branch disappeared from Venice thirty years before the fall of the Republic, under sentence of death for crimes more or less criminal.

Those to whom that nominal principality reverted, the Cane-Memmis, fell into poverty during the fatal period from 1796 to 1814. In the twentieth year of the nineteenth century they were represented only by a young man named Emilio, and by a palace considered to be one of the noblest ornaments of the Grand Canal. This child of Venice the beautiful had no other fortune than that useless palace and a yearly income of fifteen hundred lire derived from the sale to the Austrian government of a country estate on the Brenta, the last of the estates that his family once owned on the mainland. This annuity

spared the well-favored Emilio the shame of accepting, as many nobles did, the indemnity of twenty sous a day paid to all indigent patricians, as stipulated in the treaty of cession to Austria.

At the beginning of the winter season, this young noble was still at a country-house at the foot of the Tyrolean Alps, purchased the preceding spring by the Duchess Cataneo. The house, built by Palladio for the Piepolos, consists of a square pavilion in the purest style of architecture. There is an imposing staircase, a marble portico on each front, a peristyle with arched ceilings covered with frescoes and brightened by the azure background upon which charming figures are represented; ornaments rather lavishly executed, but so well proportioned that the structure carries them as a woman wears her head-dress, with an ease that rejoices the eye; in a word, the graceful dignity that distinguishes the *procuraties* of the Piazzetta in Venice. Stuccoes of beautiful design maintain a degree of coolness in the apartments which makes the atmosphere agreeable. The outer galleries, decorated with frescoes, act as screens. Everywhere is the cool Venetian pavement, in which the marble tiles change into unchangeable flowers.

The furnishings, as in most Italian palaces, displayed the most beautiful silk stuffs, lavishly employed; and there were priceless pictures judiciously hung: some by the Genoese priest known as "Il Capucino," several by Leonardo da Vinci, Carlo Dolci, Tintoretto, and Titian. In the terraced gardens may be seen those marvels of art, in which gold has been transformed into rock-grottoes, into ingenious arrangements of pebbles which seem like industry gone mad, into terraces constructed by fairies, into bosky groves severe of aspect, where the tall cypresses,

the triangular pines, the melancholy olive, are cleverly mingled with orange trees, laurels, and myrtles; into pellucid basins, where gold and vermilion fish are swimming.

Whatever one may say in favor of English gardens, those umbrella-shaped trees, those trimmed yews, that prodigality of works of art combined so cunningly with the prodigality of nature at her best; those cascades with marble steps over which the water glides timidly, like a scarf blown away by the wind, but ever replaced; those statues of gilded lead which stand mute in silent recesses; and, lastly, that noble palace which attracts the eye from every side as it rears its lace-like turrets at the foot of the Alps; those ardent thoughts which vivify stone, bronze, and plants, or which express themselves in flower-beds — that poetic prodigality was well suited to the love-affair of a duchess and a comely youth, which is a work of poesy far removed from the aims of brutal nature.

Any one who understands the fanciful in art would have been glad to see on one of those stately staircases, beside a vase with circular bas-reliefs, a little negro clad to the waist in a sort of toga of red material, holding a parasol over the duchess's head with one hand, and with the other the train of her long gown, while she listened to the words of Emilio Memmi. And what would not the Venetian have gained in being clad like one of the Senators whom Titian painted!

Alas! in that fairy palace, not unlike the *Peschieri* at Genoa, La Cataneo obeyed the decrees of Victorine and the French dressmakers. She wore a muslin dress and a hat of rice-straw, dainty pigeon-breast shoes, and thread stockings that the faintest zephyr would have blown away; over her shoulders she had a black lace shawl! But a

detail that will never be understood at Paris, where all the women are as tightly enclosed in their gowns as a dagger in its ringed sheath, was the delightful *laisser-aller* with which that fair daughter of Tuscany wore her French clothing: she had italianized it. The Frenchwoman devotes an incredible amount of serious thought to her petticoat, whereas an Italian pays little heed to it, nor does she protect it by crabbed glances, for she knows that she is under the protection of a single love, a passion sanctified and serious in her eyes as well as in another's.

Reclining on a sofa, after returning from a drive about eleven in the morning, beside a table on which lay the remnants of a dainty breakfast, the Duchess Cataneo let her lover toy with that muslin gown without saying "Fie!" at his every movement. Emilio sat on a low chair at her feet, holding one of her hands between both of his, and gazed at her in complete self-abandonment. Do not ask if they loved each other; they loved too well. They were not at the point of reading in the book, like Paul and Françoise; they were so far from it that Emilio dared not say, "Let us read." In the gleam of those eyes in which shone two green pupils striped with threads of gold that radiated from the centre, like the branches of a crack, and gave to the glance the gentle sparkle of a star, he was conscious of a thrill of nervous ecstasy which shook him to the core. At times he asked nothing more than to see the lovely black hair upon that adored head, confined by a simple band of gold, escaping in glistening tresses on either side of an ample brow; to listen to the hurried throbbing of his blood in his ears, as it rose in waves and threatened to burst the blood-vessels of the heart. By virtue of what moral phenomenon did his soul gain such entire possession of his body, that he no longer felt aught

in his own person, but everything in hers, even to the slightest word that she said to him in a voice that disturbed the springs of life within him?

If, in solitude, a woman of moderate but incessantly studied beauty becomes sublime and imposing, it may well be that a woman so gloriously beautiful as the duchess would stupefy a young man in whom mental exaltation found new sources of strength, for she had really taken entire possession of that youthful mind.

Heiress of the Doni family of Florence, Massimilla had married the Sicilian Duke Cataneo. By means of that marriage her old mother, who had since died, had proposed to make her rich and happy according to the Florentine mode of life. She had supposed that her daughter, who had just come from the convent to enter real life, would celebrate in accordance with the laws of love that second marriage of the heart which is all in all to an Italian. But Massimilla Doni had acquired at the convent an ardent taste for a religious life, and when she had plighted her faith to Duke Cataneo at the altar, she contented herself, like a good Christian, with being his wife. That was an impossibility. Cataneo, who simply wanted a duchess, found it very stupid to be a husband. When Massimilla attempted to complain of his habits, he calmly advised her to be on the lookout for a *primo cavaliere servante*, and offered his services to bring her several to choose from.

The duchess wept, the duke left her. Massimilla scrutinized the throng that hovered about her, was taken by her mother to the Pergola, to a few diplomatic houses, to the Cascines, — wherever they were likely to meet young and attractive cavaliers; she found no one who pleased her, and she determined to travel.



She lost her mother, inherited her property, wore mourning for her, went to Venice, and met Emilio, who passed her box and exchanged a glance of curious interest with her. All was said. The Venetian felt as if he had been struck by lightning, while a voice cried, "There he is!" in the duchess's ears. Anywhere else on earth, two prudent persons of ordinary intelligence would have searched their own sentiments, taken soundings, so to speak; but those two ignorances blended like two substances of the same nature which become but one on coming in contact.

Massimilla instantly turned Venetian and bought the palace she had hired on the Canareggio. Then, not knowing how to use her income, she had bought Rivalta as well, the country house where she was at this time. Emilio, having been presented to the duchess by La Vulpato, visited his new friend most respectfully in her box during the winter. Never was love more violent in two hearts, or more timid in its manifestations. The two children trembled in each other's presence. Massimilla was not a coquette: she had neither *secundo*, nor *terzo*, nor *patito*. Content with a smile and a word, she gazed in admiration on her young Venetian with the pointed face, the long, thin nose, the black eyes, and the noble brow, who, despite her ingenuous encouragement, did not go to her house until after three months spent in taming each other. The summer took on its oriental sky, the duchess complained of having to go alone to Rivalto. Happy and perturbed at once in the thought of the prospective tête-à-tête, Emilio had accompanied Massimilla in her retirement. The charming couple had been in the country six months.

At twenty years, Massimilla had not without great re-

morse sacrificed her religious scruples to love; but she had disarmed herself little by little, and was longing to celebrate that marriage of the heart, so loudly vaunted by her mother, at the moment that Emilio sat holding her beautiful, aristocratic hand, long and white and soft as satin, ending in nails of perfect shape and color, as if she had received from Asia a little of the henna used by the Sultan's wives to color theirs a vivid rose.

An unfortunate complication, unknown to Massimilla, but which was the cause of keen suffering to Emilio, had come between them in a strange way. Young though she was, Massimilla had that majesty of bearing that mythological tradition attributes to Juno, the only goddess whom mythology did not supply with a lover; for even Diana, the chaste Diana, loved and was loved. Jupiter alone was able to maintain his self-possession before his divine spouse, upon whom many ladies in England love to model themselves. Emilio placed his mistress upon too high a level for him to attain. A year later perhaps he would no longer be afflicted with that noble malady which attacks only very young and very old men. But, as he who shoots beyond the mark is as far from winning as he whose shaft falls short of it, the duchess found herself between a husband who knew that he was so far from the mark that he cared nothing about it, and a lover, who flew by it so swiftly on an angel's white wings, that he could not return to it.

Happy in being loved, Massimilla enjoyed desire without thinking of the end; while her lover, unhappy in good fortune, brought his young friend from time to time, by a promise, to the brink of what so many women call "the abyss," and found that he could do no more than pluck the flowers that grow on the edge, and strip them of their

leaves, restraining within his heart a frenzy that he dared not express in words.

They had driven together that morning, repeating to each other such a hymn of love as the birds sing among the branches of the trees. On their return, the young man, whose plight can be described only by comparing him to the angels to whom painters give only a head and wings, found himself so violently in love that he had expressed a doubt touching the duchess's entire devotion to him, so as to induce her to ask: "What proof do you want?"

The question was thrown at him with a regal air, and Memmi kissed ardently that lovely unknowing hand. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, in a rage with himself, and left Massimilla. The duchess remained in her indolent attitude on the sofa; but she wept, wondering wherein, young and lovely as she was, she was displeasing to Emilio. For his part, poor Memmi meanwhile was running head foremost into the trees like a hooded crow.

At that moment a footman came in search of the young Venetian, and ran after him to give him a letter that had just arrived by an express.

Marco Vendramini, — a name which in the Venetian dialect, in which certain final letters are dropped, is pronounced Vendramin, — his only friend, wrote to inform him that Marco Facino Cane, Prince of Varese, had died in a hospital at Paris. The certificate of his death had reached Venice. Thus the Cane-Memmis became princes of Varese.

As, in the eyes of the two friends, a title without money meant nothing, Vendramin announced, as much more momentous news, the engagement at La Fenice of the famous tenor Genovese, and of the equally famous Signora Tinti. Without finishing the letter, which he crumpled and

thrust into his pocket, Emilio hastened to tell the Duchess Cataneo the great news, forgetting his heritage.

The duchess was ignorant of the extraordinary history which commended La Tinti to the eager curiosity of Italy, and the prince told it to her in a few words. The illustrious singer had been a humble maid-servant at an inn, whose marvellous voice had impressed a great Sicilian nobleman *en voyage*. The beauty of the child, then twelve years old, being worthy of her voice, the great nobleman had the perseverance to have her educated, as Louis XV did for Mademoiselle de Romans many years ago. He waited patiently until Clara's voice had been trained by a famous teacher, and until she was sixteen, to enjoy all the treasures he had so diligently cultivated. On making her début in the preceding year, La Tinti had carried by storm the three Italian cities most difficult to satisfy.

"I am very sure that the great nobleman was not my husband," said the duchess.

## II.

THE horses were ordered at once, and the duchess started for Venice, to be present at the opening of the winter season. Thus it was that on a lovely evening in November the new Prince of Varese crossed the lagoon from Mestre to Venice, between the lines of posts in the Austrian colors which mark the lane set aside by the customs officials for gondolas. As he looked at La Cataneo's gondola, rowed by liveried servants and ploughing the waves a gun-shot in advance, poor Emilio, who had an old gondolier who had rowed his father in the time when Venice was still living, could not keep back the bitter thoughts suggested to him by his accession to the title.

"What a practical joke on the part of fortune! To be a prince, and have fifteen hundred francs a year! To own one of the noblest palaces on earth, and to have no power to dispose of marbles, balusters, paintings, or sculptures, which an Austrian decree has declared inalienable! To live over logwood piles appraised at nearly a million, and to have no furniture! To be the owner of magnificent galleries, and to occupy a room over the last arabesque frieze built with marble brought from the Morea, which a Memmius, under the Roman sway, had overrun as a conqueror! To see one's ancestors carved in priceless marble on their tombs, in one of the most magnificent churches in Venice, in the centre of a chapel embellished with paintings of Titian, Tintoretto, the two Palmas,

Bellini, and Paul Veronese, and not be able to sell one marble Memmi to England in order to supply the Prince of Varese with bread! In a single season Genovese, the celebrated tenor, will receive for his trills and semi-quavers the capital of the income with which a descendant of the Memmises, Roman Senators, a race as old as the Cæsars and Syllas, would be content. Genovese can smoke an Indian hookah, and the Prince of Varese cannot smoke cigars at his pleasure!"

And he tossed the end of his cigar into the water.

The Prince of Varese was supplied with cigars by La Cataneo, to whom he would have liked to offer all the wealth of the world. The duchess studied all his fancies, and was overjoyed to gratify them. He had no choice but to take his only meal of the day with her, — supper, — for his money went for his clothes and his admission to La Fenice. Moreover he had to set aside a hundred lire a year for his father's old gondolier, who, in order to serve him for that price, lived on rice alone. Lastly, he must also be able to pay for the cups of black coffee that he drank every morning at the Café Florian, to sustain him until evening in a state of nervous excitement, upon over-indulgence in which he relied as a sure means of death, just as Vendramin, for his part, relied on opium.

"And I am a prince!"

As he said the last word Emilio Memmi threw Marco Vendramini's letter into the lagoon without finishing it; and it floated there like a paper boat launched by a child.

"But Emilio," he continued, "is only twenty-three years old. He's a better man than the gouty Lord Wellington, than the paralytic Regent, than the imperial family of Austria afflicted as they are with the falling sickness, than the King of France —"

But, at the thought of the King of France, Emilio's forehead contracted, his ivory cheek turned yellow, tears gathered in his black eyes and moistened the long lashes; with a hand worthy to be painted by Titian he raised his dense brown hair and turned his glance once more on La Cataneo's gondola.

"The mockery in which fate indulges in my regard," he said to himself, "I encounter once more in my love. My heart and my imagination are overflowing with treasures. Massimilla knows nothing of them; she is a Florentine, and she will abandon me. Alas! that I must be cold as ice by her side when her voice and her glance arouse heavenly sensations within me! When I see her gondola a hundred yards away, it seems as if some one ran a hot iron into my heart. An invisible fluid flows along my nerves and sets them on fire, a cloud passes over my eyes, the air seems to have the same color as at Rivalta, when the light entered through red silk shades, and, unseen by her, I gazed in rapt admiration at her as she mused and smiled sweetly, like Leonardo's *Monna Lisa*. Either my Highness will end with a pistol-shot, or the descendant of the Canes will follow his old Carmagnola's advice: we will turn sailors, pirates, and amuse ourselves by seeing how long it will be before we are hanged."

The prince took a fresh cigar and watched the fantastic figures made by the smoke floating in the wind, as if to discover in their caprices an echo of his last thought. From afar he could already distinguish the points of the Moorish ornaments that graced the top of his palace, and he relapsed into melancholy. The duchess's gondola had disappeared in the Canareggio.

The vision of a romantic and hazardous life, chosen as a fitting dénouement of his love-affair, died away with his

cigar, and his friend's gondola no longer pointed out his path. Thereupon he saw the present as it was; a palace without a mind, a mind without influence on the body, a principality without money, an empty stomach and a full heart — in a word, innumerable maddening antitheses. The unfortunate youth wept for his old Venice, as Vendramini wept even more bitterly, for a profound common sorrow and a similar fate had brought about a warm friendship between the two young men, the last offshoots of two illustrious families.

Emilio could not but think of the days when the Memmi palace poured forth light from every window, and echoed with music borne afar over the waves of the Adriatic; when gondolas by the hundred were fastened to its posts, and one heard upon its porch, kissed by the waves, the moving throng of fashionable masques and dignitaries of the Republic; when its salons and its gallery were embellished by a bewildered and intriguing assemblage; when the great banquet hall, furnished with merry tables, and its lofty galleries, full of music, seemed to contain all Venice going and coming on the staircases ringing with laughter.

From century to century the chisels of the greatest sculptors had carved the bronze supports of the vases, long-necked or corpulent, purchased in China, and the thousand-branched candelabra. Every land had furnished its share of the gorgeous decorations of the walls and ceilings. To-day those walls, stripped of their beautiful hangings, and the dismal ceilings, were silent and weeping. No more Turkish carpets, no more chandeliers festooned with flowers, no more statues, no more pictures, no more merriment, and no more money, that great source of merriment!

Venice, that London of the Middle Ages, was falling in



ruin, stone by stone, man by man! The green slime which the sea fosters and caresses at the base of the palaces seemed to the prince a sort of black fringe which Nature had placed there as a symbol of death. Finally, a great English poet had swooped down upon Venice, like a crow upon a dead body, to croak in lyric verse, in that first and last language of all human societies, the words of a *De profundis*! English poetry thrown in the face of a city that had given birth to Italian poetry! Poor Venice!

Imagine the amazement of a young man absorbed by such thoughts when Carmagnola exclaimed:—

“Most Serene Highness, the palace is burning, or else the doges have returned. There are lights at the windows of the upper gallery!”

Prince Emilio thought that his dream had come true at the stroke of a magic wand. At nightfall the old gondolier, by attaching his gondola to the lowest step, succeeded in landing his master unseen by any of the people who thronged the palace, some of whom were buzzing on the stoop like bees at the entrance of a hive.

Emilio glided through the immense peristyle, from which ascended the most beautiful staircase in Venice, and crossed it quickly to learn the cause of that strange condition of affairs. A whole world of workmen were hurrying to finish the decoration and furnishing of the palace. The first floor, worthy of the old-time splendor of Venice, presented to his eyes the beautiful things of which he had been dreaming a moment before, and the fairy had arranged them with unexceptionable taste. Even the most unimportant details were executed with a splendor befitting the palace of a parvenu king.

Emilio walked about without any one addressing a single word to him, and proceeded from surprise to sur-

prise. Curious to see what was happening on the second floor, he went up, and found the furnishing completed. The unknown persons bidden by the magician to reproduce the marvels of the Thousand and One Nights in behalf of an impoverished Italian prince, were replacing some cheap pieces of furniture that had been brought thither at the outset. The prince entered the sleeping room of the apartment, which smiled upon him like a shell from which Venus had just risen. The room was so deliciously lovely, so coquettishly decorated, so full of graceful and dainty objects, that he threw himself into a *bergère* of gilded wood beside which the most toothsome of cold suppers was served, and, without further ceremony, began to eat.

"I can think of nobody on earth but Massimilla who can have conceived the idea of this festa. She must have learned that I am a prince; perhaps Duke Cataneo has died and left her his property; then she's twice as rich as before, she'll marry me, and —"

And he fell to eating in a way to incur the deadly hatred of any dyspeptic millionaire who had happened to see him devouring that supper, and drank torrents of an excellent port.

"Now, I can understand the knowing little air she assumed when she said, 'Until to-night.' Perhaps she is coming to unbewitch me. What a fine bed! and what a pretty lantern over it! — Bah! a Florentine fairy!"

There are some richly endowed constitutions upon which either extreme good fortune or extreme ill fortune has a soporific effect. Now, upon a young man whose imagination is powerful enough to idealize a mistress to such a point that he no longer sees the woman in her, the too abrupt advent of fortune is likely to have the effect of a

dose of opium. When the prince had finished the bottle of port, and had eaten half of a fish and some morsels of a French pâté, he felt a most violent desire to go to bed. Perhaps he was under the influence of a twofold intoxication. He prepared the bed with his own hands, undressed in a sweet little dressing-room, and went to bed to reflect upon his destiny.

"I forgot poor Carmagnola," he said to himself; "but my cook and my butler will attend to him."

At this moment a lady's maid entered the room gayly, humming an air from *Le Barbier de Seville*. She threw on a chair certain feminine garments, a complete night outfit, saying aloud, "They're coming back."

And a few moments later a young woman appeared, dressed in the French fashion, who might have been taken for the original of some fanciful English engraving executed for a *Forget-me-not*, or a *Book of Beauty*.

The prince quivered with dread and pleasure, for he loved Massimilla, as you know. Now, despite the loyal love with which he burned, and which in former times inspired Spain to paint pictures, Italy to paint Madonnas, Michelangelo to make statues, and Ghiberti to carve the gates of the Baptistery, lust entwined him in its meshes and desire perturbed his spirit, without, however, diffusing through his heart that warm ethereal essence with which a glance from La Cataneo, or her lightest word, filled his whole being. His mind, his heart, his will, denied themselves to infidelity; but a brutal and capricious disloyalty gained possession of his spirit.

The woman was not alone. The prince saw that she was accompanied by one of those individuals in whom no one is willing to believe as soon as they are taken from the realm of reality, in which we marvel at them, and trans-

ferred to the imaginary state of a description more or less literary. Like that of the Neapolitans, the stranger's costume was of five colors, if we may be permitted to call the black of his hat a color: the trousers were olive-green, the red waistcoat sparkled with gilt buttons, the coat bordered on green, and the linen had reached the yellow stage. He seemed to have taken it upon himself to justify Gerolamo in his presentation of the Neapolitan who always figures on the stage of his marionnette theatre. His eyes were like glass. His nose, shaped like an ace of clubs, was disgustingly protuberant; however, it covered, for very shame, a hole which it would be unjust to mankind to call a mouth, wherein were displayed three or four white fangs endowed with motion, which kept changing places with one another. The ears sagged under their own weight and gave the man a curious likeness to a dog. The complexion, strongly suspected of containing several metals infused in the blood by the prescription of some Hippocrates, was nearly black. The forehead, pointed and only partially concealed by a few scattered locks, which fell straight like filaments of blown glass, surmounted with its blotched red surface a repulsive countenance. Lastly, although he was thin and of average height, my gentleman had long arms and broad shoulders. Despite all these shocking details, and although you would have taken him for a man of seventy, he did not lack a certain cyclopean majesty; he had aristocratic manners, and in his glance the self-assurance of a rich man.

To any one whose heart was stout enough to observe him closely, his history was written by the passions upon that once noble, now slimy clay. You would have divined the *grand seigneur*, who, rich from his boyhood, had sold his body to debauchery in order to obtain therefrom abnormal

enjoyment. Debauchery had wrecked the human creature and had fashioned another for its own use. Tens of thousands of bottles had passed beneath the bloated arches of that grotesque nose, leaving their dregs on his lips. Arduous and fatiguing digestion had carried away the teeth. The eyes had grown dim in the glare of the gaming-table. The blood had become laden with impure elements which had deranged the nervous system. The overworking of the digestive organs had absorbed the intelligence. And love had scattered to the winds the young man's glossy locks. Like a greedy heir, each vice had marked its portion of the still living corpse.

When one is an observer of nature, one discovers therein the pleasantries of a superior order of sarcasm: Nature has, for instance, placed toads beside flowers, even as that duke was beside that rose of love.

"Will you play the violin this evening, my dear duke?" said the woman, releasing the tie-back, and letting a magnificent portière fall over the door.

"Play the violin!" muttered Prince Emilio, "what does she mean? What has been done with my palace? Am I awake? Here am I in this woman's bed, who seems to think she's at home. She's taking off her mantilla! In God's name, have I been smoking opium, like Vendramin, and am I in the midst of one of those dreams in which he sees Venice as she was three hundred years ago?"

Seated before her dressing-table, brightly lighted by candles, the stranger began to remove her ornaments as calmly as possible.

"Ring for Julia; I am in a hurry to undress."

At that moment the duke noticed the partly eaten supper, looked into the bedroom, and saw the prince's trousers tossed on an armchair near the bed.

"I will not ring, Clarina!" he cried furiously, in a shrill voice. "I won't play the violin to-night, nor to-morrow, nor ever again."

"La la la la!" sang Clarina on a single note, jumping from octave to octave with the skill of the nightingale.

"For all of that voice, which would make your patroness Saint Claire jealous, you are far too impudent, madame hussy!"

"You did n't bring me up to listen to such words," she said proudly.

"Did I teach you to keep a man in your bed? You deserve neither my benefactions nor my hatred."

"A man in my bed!" cried Clarina, turning quickly.

"And who has coolly eaten our supper, as if he were at home," added the duke.

"Why, am I not at home?" exclaimed Emilio. "I am the Prince of Varese, and this palace is mine."

As he spoke, Emilio sat up in bed and showed his noble and beautiful Venetian face amid the gorgeous draperies. Instantly Clarina began to laugh — madly, as young women are wont to do when they meet with a comical experience impossible to anticipate. But her laughter came to an end when she noticed the young man more particularly; for, as we have said, he was remarkably handsome, although insufficiently clad. The same frenzy that was consuming Emilio seized her, and as she was not in love with anybody, there was nothing to curb her caprice — the caprice of an enamoured Sicilian.

"Although this is the Memmi palace, your Most Serene Highness will nevertheless be kind enough to leave it," said the duke, assuming the cool and ironical tone of a polished gentleman. "I am under my own roof —"

"Understand, duke, that you are in my bedroom and

not under your own roof," said Clarina, emerging from her stupor. "If you have any suspicion touching my virtue, I beg you to leave me the profits of my crime."

"Suspicion! Say, rather, certainty, my love."

"I swear," rejoined Clarina, "that I am innocent."

"But what is it I see yonder, in that bed?"

"Ah! old sorcerer, if you believe what you see rather than what I tell you," cried Clarina, "then you no longer love me! Go, and don't belabor my ears any more! Do you hear me? Leave the room, sir! This young prince will repay you the million you have spent on me, if you insist."

"I'll not repay anything!" said Emilio under his breath.

"Oh! there's nothing for us to repay; a million's a mere nothing to pay for having had Clarina Tinti when one's so ugly! — Come, off with you," she said to the duke; "you have thrown me over and I throw you over — so we're quits."

At a gesture from the old noble, who seemed disposed to resist that explicit command, the prima donna, in an attitude befitting the rôle of Semiramis, to which she owed her great reputation, darted at the old ape and put him out of the room.

"If you don't leave me in peace (*tranquille*) to-night, we shall never meet again. My 'never' means more than yours," she said.

"*Tranquille!*" said the duke with a bitter laugh; "it seems to me, my dear idol, that I am leaving you *agitata*, rather."

He left the room. That act of cowardice did not surprise Emilio. All those persons who have become accustomed to some special taste, chosen from among all the

results of love, and in perfect accord with their nature, know that no consideration will stop a man who has made a habit of his passion.

La Tinti leaped like a faun from the door to the bed.

"A prince, and poor and young and handsome! Why, it's like a fairy tale," she said.

The Sicilian perched herself on the bed with a grace that recalled the unstudied *abandon* of the wild animal, the instinctive upreaching of the plant toward the sun, or the playful movement of the leaves dancing in the wind. As she unfastened the clasps of her dress, she began to sing, not with the voice assumed to win applause at La Fenice, but with a voice made tremulous by desire. Her song was a breeze that bore to the heart the caresses of love. She looked stealthily at Emilio, who was no less perturbed than she; for the stage singer had lost the audacity that had animated her eyes, her actions, and her voice, when she dismissed the duke; no, she was as humble as the lovesick courtesan.

To form a just idea of La Tinti, one must have seen one of the best of French singers at her *début* in *Il Fazzoletto*, an opera by Garcia, which the Italian company was then giving at the theatre on rue Louvois; she was so beautiful that an unhappy guardsman, having failed to win her favor, killed himself in despair. The prima donna of La Fenice had the same refinement of expression, the same elegance of form, the same youthfulness; but in her there was a superabundance of the warm coloring of Sicily, which gilded her beauty as it were. Her voice, too, was richer; and, finally, she had that air of majesty which is characteristic of the Italian woman's figure.

La Tinti, whose name so closely resembles that which the French singer in question manufactured for herself,



was seventeen, and the penniless prince twenty-three. What sportive hand had amused itself by dropping powder so near the flame? A perfumed bedroom, hung with flesh-colored silk, brilliant with the light of many candles; a bed draped with lace; a silent palace, and Venice! Two youths, beautiful both! All sorts of splendor in combination!

Emilio seized his trousers, leaped out of bed, rushed into the dressing-room, dressed, returned to the bedroom and made a dash for the door.

This is what he said to himself as he put on his clothes: —

“Massimilla, dear daughter of the Donis, in whom the beauty of Italy is an hereditary possession; thou who dost not belie the portrait of Margharita, one of the few canvases painted entirely by Raphael, to his immortal glory! my beautiful and saintly mistress, shall I not the better merit thy love by flying from this flowery hell? Should I be worthy of thee, if I profaned a heart that is all thine? No, I will not fall into the vulgar snare which my rebellious senses spread before my feet. Let this wanton have her duke; my duchess for me!”

As he raised the portière, he heard a moan. The heroic lover turned and saw La Tinti with her face buried on the bed, stifling her sobs. Would you believe it? The singer was lovelier on her knees, with her face covered, than she was in confusion, with her face gleaming with passion. Her loosened hair falling over her shoulders, her Magdalene-like pose, the disorder of her torn clothing, all had been arranged by the devil, who, you know, is a wonderful colorist.

The prince took poor Tinti by the waist; she slipped from him like a snake and twined herself about one of his feet, which her too alluring flesh pressed softly.

"Will you explain to me," he said, shaking his foot to release it from her grasp, "how you happen to be here in my palace? how it is that poor Emilio Memmi —"

"Emilio Memmi!" cried La Tinti, rising from the floor; "you said you were a prince."

"A prince since yesterday."

"You love La Cataneo!" said she, eyeing him from head to foot.

Emilio made no reply, seeing that the prima donna smiled amid her tears.

"Your Highness is unaware that the man who educated me for the stage, that this duke, is Cataneo himself; and your friend Vendramin, thinking to advance your interests, let this palace to him for the time of my engagement at La Fenice, at a rent of a thousand crowns. Dear object of my desire," she continued, taking his hand and drawing him toward her, "why do you avoid her for whom many men would consent to have every bone in their body broken? Love, you see, will always be love. It is everywhere the same; it is, as it were, the sun of our hearts — we warm ourselves wherever it shines, and it is now high noon. If you are not content to-morrow, kill me! But I shall live, I tell you, for I am wonderfully beautiful."

Emilio determined to stay. When he had consented with a nod, the thrill of joy that shook La Tinti seemed to him to be illuminated by a gleam from hell. Never had love assumed in his eyes so imposing an expression.

At that moment Carmagnola whistled furiously.

"What can he want of me?" the prince asked himself.

Vanquished by love, Emilio paid no heed to Carmagnola's repeated whistling.

## III.

If you have never travelled in Switzerland, perchance you will read this description with pleasure; and if you have climbed the Alps, you will not recall your experiences without emotion. In that sublime country, in the very heart of a cliff split in twain by a valley forming a road as broad as the avenue from Neuilly to Paris, but six hundred feet deep and cut by many ravines, there is a stream flowing from the St. Gothard or the Simplon, — from some alpine summit, — that falls at last into a vast well, I know not how many feet deep, but several fathoms long and wide, bordered by shattered blocks of granite amid which are green fields, fir trees, and gigantic elms; there strawberries also grow, and violets. Here and there one spies a chalet, with the wholesome face of a fair-haired Swiss maid at the window. As the sky is bright or lowering, the water in the basin is blue or green, but of a blue like the sapphire, of a green like the emerald. Now, nothing on earth represents to the most heedless traveller, the most preoccupied diplomatist, the most respectable grocer, the idea of depth, of tranquillity, of immensity, of divine love, of eternal happiness, so perfectly as that liquid diamond, where the snow, rushing down from the loftiest summits, flows in a limpid stream through a natural trench hollowed out of the rock and hidden under the trees, and whence it escapes, noiselessly, through a cleft. The water that fills the basin flows so gently that you see no ruffling

of the surface wherein the passing carriage is reflected. But touch the horses with the lash! you turn a corner of the cliff, clatter across a bridge, and suddenly there bursts upon your ears a deafening concert of waterfalls hurling themselves one upon another: the torrent, having made its escape by a mad leap, is shattered into a thousand cascades, divided by a thousand huge boulders; it sparkles in numberless sheets of spray against a rock detached from the summit of the chain that overhangs the valley, and lying prostrate exactly in the centre of this highway, which water, the most worthy of respect of all living forces, has imperiously broken out for itself.

If you have carefully observed that landscape, you will have in the placid basin an image of Emilio's love for the duchess, and in the cascades, gambolling like a flock of sheep, an image of his night of love with La Tinti. Amid those torrents of passion there arose a boulder, against which the waters broke. The prince was like Sisyphus, always beneath the rock.

"What on earth does Duke Cataneo do with his violin?" he said to himself; "is it he to whom I am indebted for this symphony?"

He opened the subject to Clara Tinti.

"Dear child" (she had discovered that the prince was a child), "dear child," she said, "that man, who is a hundred and twenty years old in the parish of Vice, and forty-seven on the registers of the Church, has but a single pleasure left on earth by which he really savors life. Yes, all the cords are broken, everything about him is in ruins or in tatters; spirit, intellect, heart, nerves, everything that gives a man animation, and attaches him to heaven by desire or by the flame of lust, clings not so much to music as to one among the innumerable effects of music,

to a perfect harmony between two voices, or between a voice and the treble string of his violin. The old baboon sits in my lap and takes his fiddle; he plays passing well, he extracts notes from it; I try to imitate them, and when the long-sought moment arrives and it is impossible to distinguish the notes of the violin from the notes that come from my windpipe, the old man falls into an ecstatic frenzy, his dead eyes emit their last expiring flames, he is wild with joy and rolls on the floor like a drunken man. That is why he pays Genovese such a price. Genovese is the only tenor whose voice sometimes harmonizes with mine. Either we do really come measurably near each other once or twice a week, or the duke imagines that we do; and to enjoy that imaginary pleasure he engaged Genovese — Genovese belongs to him. No manager of a theatre can make that man sing without me, or make me sing without him. The duke educated me in order to gratify this whim of his; I owe to him my talent, my beauty, and my fortune too, no doubt. He will die in an attack of perfect harmony. The sense of hearing is the only one that has survived the shipwreck of his faculties, and that is the thread by which he still clings to life. From that decayed stump, one vigorous shoot has sprung. There are, I am told, many men in that condition; may the Madonna protect them! You have n't come to that! You can do whatever you choose, and whatever I choose — I am sure of that."

Toward morning Emilio stole softly from the room, and found Carmagnola lying across the doorway.

"Highness," said the gondolier, "the duchess ordered me to give you this note."

He handed his master a dainty sheet, folded in a triangle. The prince felt his legs tremble and went back into

the room, where he fell upon a couch; for his eyes were dim and his hands shook as he read these words: —

“DEAR EMILIO, — Your gondola stopped at your palace. Do you not know that Cataneo has hired it for La Tinti? If you love me, go this evening to Vendramin, who tells me that he has apartments ready for you in his house. What shall I do? Had I best remain at Venice, with my husband and his singer here? Shall we go together to Friuli? Answer me with a word, if only to tell me what the letter was that you threw into the lagoon.

“MASSIMILLA DONI.”

The handwriting and the perfume of the paper awoke a thousand memories in the young Venetian's mind. The sun of his only love cast its brilliant light upon the blue wave which had come from afar, gathered in the bottomless abyss, and which sparkled like a star. The noble youth could not hold back the tears that gushed from his eyes; for in the languor of the fatigue resulting from the glutting of his passion, he was powerless against the contact of that spotless divinity.

In her sleep Clarina heard his sobs; she sat up in bed, saw her prince in a grief-stricken attitude, rushed to him, fell at his feet, and embraced his knees.

“The messenger is still waiting for the reply,” said Carmagnola, raising the portière.

“Shameless creature, you have ruined my life!” cried Emilio, rising hastily and pushing La Tinti away with his foot.

She hugged it so fondly, imploring an explanation by a glance, — the glance of a distressed Samaritan, — that Emilio, frantic to find himself still enmeshed in the passion which had led him to degrade himself, repulsed the singer with a brutal kick.

"You told me to kill you," he cried; "die, poisonous beast!"

Then he rushed from the palace, jumped into his gondola, and shouted to Camagnola: —

"Row!"

"Where?" asked the old man.

"Wherever you please."

The gondolier divined his master's wishes and took him, by innumerable détours, to the Canareggio, to the door of a marvellously beautiful palace which you will inevitably admire when you go to Venice; for no stranger ever failed to order his gondolier to stop at sight of those windows, all decorated differently, rivalling one another in fantastic effects, with balconies carved like the most elaborate laces; of the corners of the palace, marked by tall columns, slender and twisted; of the stone courses, worked by so ingenious a chisel that one can find no figure repeated in the arabesques. How exquisite the door is, and how mysterious the long-arched passage leading to the stairway! And who could fail to admire the stairs wherein judicious art has laid, to remain for so long a time as Venice shall endure, a carpet as rich as a Turkish rug, but composed of stones of innumerable shapes inlaid in white marble! You will fall in love with the fascinating conceits that adorn the arches, gilded like those of the ducal palace, and that rise step by step above you, so that there are marvellous works of art beneath your feet and over your head.

What soft shadows, what silence, what refreshing coolness! But what an atmosphere of solemnity, too, in that venerable palace, where, to please Emilio, as well as his friend Vendramini, the duchess had collected ancient Venetian furniture, and where skilful hands had restored

the ceilings! There Venice lived again, in its entirety. The splendor was not noble and dignified only — it was instinctive. The archæologist would have found there types of the beautiful as the Middle Ages conceived it, which took their models from Venice. There could be seen both the earliest wooden ceilings covered with designs of flowers in gilt on a colored background, or in colors on a background of gold, and the ceilings of gilded stucco, whereon were painted, in each corner, scenes containing several persons, and in the centre the loveliest frescoes: the latter style being so ruinously expensive that the Louvre has but two of them, and even the lavish hand of Louis XIV recoiled from such an outlay at Versailles. On every side, marble and wood and rare fabrics were used as materials of priceless works of art.

Emilio opened a carved oaken door, passed through the long gallery that leads from one end to the other of all Venetian palaces, on each floor, and paused at another well-known door which made his heart beat fast. When he appeared, the duchess's lady-in-waiting came out from an immense salon and admitted him to a sort of study, where he found the duchess on her knees before a Madonna. He had come to plead guilty and to sue for pardon. The sight of Massimilla on her knees transformed him. He and God — naught else in her heart!

The duchess rose quietly and offered her hand to her friend, who did not take it.

"Did n't Gianbattista find you last night?" she asked.

"No," he replied.

"That miscarriage was the cause of my passing a wretched night! I was so terrified lest you should meet the duke, whose utter viciousness I know so well! What an idea it was of Vendramini's to let your palace to him!"



"An excellent idea, Milla, for your prince is far from rich."

Massimilla was so serene in her confidence, so magnificent in her beauty, so tranquillized by Emilio's presence, that at that moment the prince, with every faculty on the alert, suffered all the sensations of that horrible dream which often torments men of lively imagination, in which, having gone to a ball thronged with beautifully dressed women, the dreamer suddenly finds himself without his shirt, absolutely naked; shame and terror lash him in turn, and waking alone sets him free from his agony.

Such was the plight of Emilio's heart in his mistress's presence. Hitherto, that heart had been arrayed in the sweetest flowers of sentiment; debauchery had reduced it to an ignoble plight, and he alone was aware of it; for the lovely Florentine ascribed so much power to her love as to believe that the man whom she loved would be incapable of receiving the slightest stain.

As Emilio did not take her hand, the duchess rose and ran her fingers through the hair that La Tinti had kissed. Then she felt of Emilio's moist hand and saw that his brow was damp with perspiration.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a voice to which affection imparted the sweetness of a flute.

"I never knew until this moment the depth of my love," Emilio replied.

"Well, my beloved idol, what would you have?"

At those words all Emilio's life rushed back to his heart.

"What have I done to bring her to that question?" he thought.

"Emilio, what was the letter you threw into the lagoon?"

"Vendramini's, which I had not finished; otherwise I should not have gone to my palace and fallen in with the duke, for he told me about him in the letter, doubtless."

Massimilla turned pale, but a gesture from Emilio reassured her.

"Stay with me all day, and we will go to the theatre together. Let's not go to Friuli, for your presence will surely help me to endure Cataneo's," said Massimilla.

Although it was certain to cause the lover endless mental torture, he consented with ostensible delight. If anything can convey an idea of the sensations of the condemned when they realize how unworthy they are in God's sight, it is the plight of a young man, still essentially pure, before a revered mistress, when he has upon his lips the taste of an infidelity, when he brings into the sanctuary of the beloved divinity the pestiferous atmosphere of a harlot! Baader, who in his lessons explained the most divine things by erotic comparisons, had doubtless noticed, like the Catholic writers, the startling resemblance between human love and love of God.

His suffering imparted a tinge of melancholy to the pleasure that the Venetian enjoyed in his mistress's society. A woman's mind has a most extraordinary aptitude for putting itself in harmony with the sentiments of another person: she assumes the color, she vibrates with the note that a lover brings to her. So it was that the duchess became thoughtful. The irritating sensations inspired by the salt of coquetry are far from spurring love on so powerfully as this sweet harmony of emotions. The strivings of coquetry hint too strongly at a separation; and, although but momentary, it is unpleasant; whereas this sympathetic sharing of emotions denotes a constant fusion of hearts. So that poor Emilio was deeply moved

by the silent divination which caused the duchess to weep over an unknown transgression.

Feeling all the stronger when she found that she was not attacked on the sensual side of love, the duchess felt justified in adopting an affectionate tone; she displayed her angelic spirit boldly and confidently; she laid it bare, even as the tempestuous La Tinti, during that infernal night, had exhibited her body with its rounded outlines, and its firm, supple flesh. In Emilio's eyes there was a sort of joust between the sanctified love of that spotless soul and the love of the nervous and quick-tempered Sicilian.

The day, then, was passed in long glances exchanged after profound meditation. Each of them scrutinized his or her own affection and found it infinite — a source of security which prompted soft words. Modesty, that divinity which, in a moment of forgetfulness with Love, gave birth to Coquetry, would have had no need to put her hand over her eyes at sight of those two lovers. For her sole sensual indulgence, for her most delirious enjoyment, Massimilla held Emilio's head against her breast, and ventured now and again to press her lips upon his, but as a bird dips its beak in the limpid water of a spring, glancing timidly about to see if any one is looking. Their thoughts developed that kiss as a composer develops a theme by the endless variations of music, and it produced within them tumultuous, wavering echoes, which fevered their blood. Inevitably the idea will always be more vehement than the fact; otherwise, desire would be inferior to enjoyment, whereas it is really more powerful, it engenders it. Thus they were completely happy, for enjoyment of good fortune always diminishes the good fortune. Married only in heaven, those two lovers adored

each other in their purest form, that of two hearts aflame and joined together in the celestial light — a radiant spectacle to eyes that faith has touched, and abounding especially in boundless joys which the brush of the Raphaels and Titians and Murillos succeeded in reproducing, and which those who have felt them recognize at sight of the works of those great artists. The grosser pleasures lavished by the Sicilian singer — a material proof of that angelic union — should surely be despised by loftier minds.

The prince made these judicious reflections as he lay in a sort of heavenly languor on the cool, white, yielding breast of Massimilla, in the warm beams of her eyes with their long, glossy lashes; and he lost himself in the boundless expanse of that libertinage of the imagination. At such times Massimilla was transformed into one of those celestial virgins of whom we catch glimpses in dreams, who vanish at cockcrow, but whom we recognize in their luminous sphere in a few works of the illustrious painters of the heavenly realms.

In the evening the lovers went to the theatre. So goes life in Italy: in the morning, love, in the evening, music, at night, sleep. How much to be preferred is such an existence to that of the countries where every one uses his lungs and his strength in politics, with no more power to change the march of events unaided than a single grain of sand can make a cloud of dust. In those curious countries, liberty consists in quarrelling about public affairs, in looking out for one's self, in wasting one's energies in innumerable patriotic employments, each more senseless than the rest, in that they are all at odds with the noble and sacred egoism which lies at the root of all great human achievements.

At Venice, on the contrary, love and its thousand offshoots, agreeable occupation about genuine pleasures, seize upon and monopolize the time. In that country love is such a natural thing that the duchess was considered a most extraordinary person; for every one was convinced of her chastity despite the violence of Emilio's passion. Wherefore the women sincerely pitied the unfortunate young man, who was looked upon as a victim of the saint-like purity of the woman he loved. However, no one dared to blame the duchess, for in Italy religion is a power held in no less veneration than love.

Every evening at the theatre the opera glasses were turned first of all on La Cataneo's box, and every woman said to her cavalier, pointing to the duchess and her lover: —

"How far have they progressed?"

The cavalier would scrutinize Emilio, in search of some indications of good fortune, and find only the signs of a pure and melancholy passion. And as they visited from box to box the men would say to the women: —

"La Cataneo is n't Emilio's yet."

"She is making a mistake," the old women would say; "she 'll tire him out."

"*Forse!*" the young women would reply, with the solemnity of manner with which the Italians utter that popular word, which means many things.

Some women were very angry, considered that the affair set a very bad example, and said that it was a misinterpretation of religion to let it stifle love.

"Pray love Emilio, my dear," said La Vulpato to the duchess, when they met on the grand staircase.

"Why, I do love him with all my heart," she replied.

"In that case why does n't he look happier?"

The duchess replied with a tiny shrug.

We cannot conceive, here in France as transformed by the increasing mania for aping English manners, with what seriousness Venetian society carried on that investigation. Vendramini alone knew Emilio's secret, a secret closely kept by two men who had joined their coats-of-arms, and had written beneath, "Not friends, but brothers."

## IV.

THE opening of the season is a great event in Venice as it is in all other Italian capitals; so that La Fenice was full that night. The five evening hours passed at the theatre play so important a part in Italian life that it may be worth while to describe the habits consequent upon that method of employing the time.

In Italy the boxes are different from those in other countries, in the sense that everywhere else the women want to be seen, while the Italian women care very little about putting themselves on exhibition. Their boxes form an oblong parallelogram, running diagonally with reference to the stage and to the corridor alike. On the right and on the left are couches, at the ends of which are two arm-chairs, one for the mistress of the box, and one for her companion when she has one with her, which rarely happens. Every woman is too busily engaged in her own box to pay visits or to care to receive them; nor, indeed, are they anxious to provide themselves with a rival. So that an Italian woman almost always reigns alone in her box: there, mothers are not slaves to their daughters, and daughters are not embarrassed by their mothers; in fact, the women have neither parents nor children with them, to reprove them, spy upon them, annoy them, or break into their conversations.

The front of all the boxes is draped with silk of uniform color and arranged in the same way. From these dra-

peries hang curtains of the same color, which are kept drawn when the family to whom the box belongs is in mourning. With a few exceptions, and those only in Milan, the boxes are not lighted within; they obtain their light only from the stage or from a far from brilliant chandelier, which some cities, in spite of vehement protests, have allowed to be hung in their theatres; but, by favor of the curtains, they are still dark enough, and, on account of the way they are arranged, the back of the box is in such deep shadow that it is very hard to see what is going on there.

These boxes, which will hold some eight or ten persons, are hung in rich silken stuffs, the ceilings are painted prettily and lightened by bright colors, and the woodwork is gilded. People take ices and sherbets there, and nibble sweetmeats; for only those of the lower classes actually eat in them. Each box is real property of considerable value; there are some that are worth thirty thousand lire; at Milan the Litta family owns three, side by side.

These facts demonstrate the great importance attached to this detail of the life of the leisure class. Conversation is absolute monarch in that small space, which one of the most ingenious writers of the present day, and one of those who have studied Italy with the best results, Stendhal, has called a little salon with a window looking on the pit. In truth, the music and the attractions of the stage are entirely secondary; the main interest is in the conversations that are going on, in the momentous little love-affairs that are being negotiated, in the assignations that are being arranged, in the stories and commentaries that pass from mouth to mouth. The theatre is the inexpensive meeting-place of a whole society pulling itself to pieces and making fun of itself.

The men who are admitted to the box take their seats



one after another on one or the other sofa. The first arrival naturally finds himself nearest the mistress of the box; but when both sofas are full, if a new visitor arrives, the first-comer breaks off his conversation and takes his leave. Thereupon every one goes up a place, and in his turn reaches the sovereign's side.

These meaningless chats, these serious conversations, this refined badinage of Italian life could not go on without a general freedom of action. For instance, women are at liberty to wear full dress or not; they are so entirely at home that a stranger who is admitted to their box may call upon them the next day at their house. The traveller does not understand at first glance this life of clever indolence, this *dolce far niente* embellished by music. Long residence and shrewd observation alone will make clear to a foreigner the meaning of Italian life, which resembles the cloudless sky of the country, and in which the rich man does not willingly endure a cloud. The noble pays little heed to the management of his fortune: he leaves the administration of his estates to stewards (*ragionati*), who rob and ruin him; he has no political bent, which would soon bore him; so he lives solely through his passions and fills his hours with them. Hence the need which the lover and his innamorata feel of being always together, either to satisfy each other or to watch each other; for the great secret of this life is that the lover shall always be kept in sight for five hours in the evening by a woman who has taken up his whole morning. Thus Italian manners permit constant enjoyment and involve a study of the means best calculated to maintain it, albeit concealed beneath apparent indifference. It is a fine life, but an expensive one, for in no other country does one meet so many worn-out men.

The duchess's box was on the lower tier, called in Venice *pepiano*; she always seated herself within the circle of light from the footlights, so that her lovely face stood out clearly against the semi-obscurity behind her. She attracted the eye by her high snow-white brow, crowned by the masses of her black hair, which gave her a truly regal aspect; by the delicacy of her features, which recalled the gentle dignity of the heads of Andrea del Sarto; by the shape of her face and the framing of her eyes, and by those velvety eyes themselves, which infected one with the ecstasy of the woman dreaming of love, still chaste in her love, and majestic and sweet at once.

Instead of *Moses*, in which La Tinti was to have made her début with Genovese, they gave *Il Barbiere*, in which the tenor sang without the celebrated prima donna. The impresario had announced that he was forced to change the opera because of La Tinti's indisposition, and, in fact, Duke Cataneo did not appear. Was it a clever device on the impresario's part to obtain two full houses by having Genovese and Clarina make their débuts on two successive nights, or was the latter really indisposed? On that point, as to which the pit might reasonably disagree, Emilio felt little doubt; but although the news of the singer's illness caused him some remorse when he remembered her beauty and his own brutality, that twofold absence put the prince and duchess alike at their ease.

Moreover, Genovese sang in a fashion to drive away the memories of that night of impure love and to prolong the blessed joys of that delicious day. Delighted to have the applause all to himself, the tenor displayed all the marvellous resources of the talent which later enjoyed a European celebrity. Genovese, at this time twenty-three years of age, a native of Bergamo and a pupil of Veluti,

passionately fond of his art, with an excellent figure and attractive face, and quick to grasp the spirit of his rôles, already gave promise of becoming the great artist destined to win fortune and renown. He had a mad triumph, a phrase which may properly be used only in Italy, where the gratitude of the pit to whoever affords it enjoyment has a touch of genuine frenzy in its manifestation.

Several of the prince's friends came to congratulate him on his inheritance and to repeat the gossip of the day. On the previous evening, La Tinti, escorted by Duke Cataneo, had sung at La Vulpato's reception, where she was apparently as well physically as her voice was beautiful; so that her improvised illness caused much comment. According to the rumors at the Café Florian, Genovese was passionately in love with La Tinti, who was determined to protect herself from his declarations of love, and the manager had been unable to persuade them to appear together. According to the Austrian general, the duke alone was sick, La Tinti was nursing him, and Genovese had been entrusted with the mission of consoling the pit.

The duchess was indebted for the general's call to the arrival of a French physician, whom he desired to introduce to her. The prince, seeing Vendramin prowling about the pit, went out for a confidential chat with that friend whom he had not seen for three months; and as they walked back and forth in the space between the benches of the pit and the boxes in the lower tier he was able to observe the duchess's reception of the stranger.

"Who is that Frenchman?" he asked Vendramin.

"A doctor summoned by Cataneo, who wants to know how long he still has to live. The Frenchman is waiting for Malfatti, with whom he is to have a consultation."

Like all Italian ladies who are in love, the duchess did

not take her eyes off Emilio, for in that country a woman abandons herself so completely that it is hard to surprise an expressive glance deflected from its source.

"*Caro*," said the prince to Vendramin, "remember that I slept at your house last night."

"Have you conquered?" asked Vendramin, putting his arm about his friend's waist.

"No; but I think that I may some day be happy with Massimilla."

"Well," rejoined Marco, "you will be the most envied man on earth. The duchess is the most accomplished woman in Italy. For my part, seeing sublunary things as I do through the brilliant vapors of opium intoxication, she seems the very loftiest expression of art, for in truth Nature, without suspecting it, made in her person a portrait by Raphael. Your passion is not displeasing to Cataneo, who paid me on the spot a thousand crowns which I have in hand for you."

"And so," said Emilio, "whatever any one may say to you, I pass every night with you. Come, for a minute away from her, when I may be with her, is perfect torture."

Emilio took his place at the back of the box and sat silent in his corner, listening to the duchess, enjoying her wit and her beauty. It was for him and not in vanity that Massimilla displayed the charms of her marvellous conversational powers, abounding in Italian wit, where the sarcasm was aimed at things not persons, where mockery assailed only sentiments that merited it, where a pinch of Attic salt gave zest to trifles. Elsewhere she might have been tiresome; the Italians, who are eminently intelligent folk, are not fond of straining their intelligence without occasion; among them conversation runs smoothly, and

is carried on without effort; it never permits, as in France, an assault of fencing-masters, in which every one waves his foil, and the man who does not succeed in saying something is humiliated. If conversation in Italy is brilliant, it is by virtue of an indolent and voluptuous sort of satire which toys gracefully with well-known facts; and, instead of an epigram, which may be hazardous, the Italians toss from one to another a glance or a smile whose expression it is impossible to describe. To be called upon to understand thoughts when they are in search of enjoyment simply is in their opinion, and rightly, too, a terrible bore.

"If you loved him, you would n't talk so well," La Vulpato would sometimes say to La Cataneo.

Emilio never took part in the conversation: he looked on and listened. That aloofness would have led many strangers to think that the prince was a man of no intelligence, as they are apt to imagine of Italians who are in love; whereas he was simply a lover buried in pleasure up to his neck.

Vendramin seated himself by the prince's side, facing the Frenchman, who, being a stranger, retained his place in the corner opposite that occupied by the duchess.

"Is that gentleman intoxicated?" the physician whispered to the duchess, after scrutinizing Vendramin.

"Yes," she replied simply.

In that land of passion, every passion carries its own excuse, and there is an admirable indulgence for all shortcomings. The duchess sighed deeply and her face assumed an expression of restrained grief.

"In our country we see strange things, signore! Vendramin lives on opium, this man lives on love, that one buries himself in silence, most wealthy young men fall in love with ballet-dancers, wise men amass money;

we all fashion for ourselves some form of happiness or intoxication."

"Because you all wish to divert your thoughts from a fixed idea, which a revolution would cure radically," rejoined the physician. "The Genoese regrets his republic, the Milanese longs for independence, the Piedmontese wants a constitutional government, the Romagnese sighs for liberty —"

"Which he does n't understand," the duchess interrupted. "Alas! there are countries mad enough to long for your idiotic Charter, which destroys the influence of women. Most of my compatriots want to read your French effusions — useless humbug —"

"Useless!" cried the physician.

"Why, signore," continued the duchess, "what can one find in a book better than what we have in our hearts? Italy is mad!"

"I don't see why a people should be called mad for wanting to be their own masters," retorted the physician.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed the duchess, "are n't you buying at the price of a deal of blood the right to quarrel, as you are doing, for nonsensical ideas?"

"You are in love with despotism!" cried the physician.

"Why should I not love a system of government which, while depriving us of books and soul-sickening politics, leaves us good, whole men?"

"I thought the Italians were more patriotic," said the Frenchman.

The duchess began to laugh so slyly that her interlocutor could not distinguish mockery from the truth, nor her real opinions from sarcastic criticism.

"So you are not a liberal?" he said.

"God forbid!" she replied. "I cannot imagine any-

thing in worst taste than for a woman to have such opinions. Would you care for a woman who carried all mankind in her heart?"

"People in love are naturally aristocratic," said the Austrian general with a smile.

"When we came into the theatre," said the Frenchman, "I saw you first, and I remarked to his Excellency that if it were possible for one woman to represent a country, you were that woman; it seemed to me that I had before me the genius of Italy, but I regret to see that, although you present its sublime form, you have not the — constitutional spirit," he added.

"You must surely," said the duchess, motioning to him to look at the ballet, "find our dancers detestable and our singers abominable! Paris and London rob us of all our great talents: Paris passes judgment on them and London pays them. Genovese and La Tinti won't stay with us six months."

Just then the general left the box. Vendramin, the prince, and two other Italians exchanged a glance and a smile, pointing to the French physician. Strangely enough for a Frenchman, he was not sure of himself, thinking that he must have said or done something inopportune; but he soon had the key to the riddle.

"Do you think," Emilio asked him, "that it would be prudent to speak openly before our masters?"

"You are in an enslaved country," said the duchess, in a tone and with a movement of the head which suddenly restored to her face the expressiveness that the physician had denied it a moment before. "Vendramin," she continued, speaking so that no one but the stranger could hear her, "has taken to smoking opium, an infernal idea suggested by an Englishman who, for reasons entirely

different from his, desired a luxurious death; not the every-day death, to which you have given the shape of a skeleton, but death decked out with the rags which you in France call banners, death in the guise of a young girl crowned with flowers or laurels. She comes in the centre of a cloud of powder-smoke, borne upon the wind made by a cannon-ball, or lying on a bed between two courtesans; she rises, too, from the steam of a bowl of punch, or from the impish vapors of the diamond which is still in the state of carbon. When Vendramin chooses, at the cost of three Austrian lire, he becomes a Venetian general, he goes aboard the galleys of the Republic, and sets out to conquer the gilded domes of Constantinople. Then he reclines on the divans of the seraglio, among the wives of the Sultan, who has become the humble dependent of his triumphant Venice. Then he comes home, bringing with him, to refurnish his palace, the spoils of the Turkish empire. He passes from the women of the East to the doubly concealed intrigues of his dear Venetians, dreading the results of a jealousy that has ceased to exist. For three *swansiks*, he becomes one of the Council of Ten, he wields the terrifying power of that office, gives his attention to the most momentous affairs, and leaves the ducal palace in a gondola, to lie under the potent spell of two eyes of flame, or to scale a balcony from which a white hand has hung a ladder of silk; he loves a woman to whom opium imparts a poetic coloring which we women of mere flesh and blood cannot offer him. Suddenly, on turning about, he finds himself face to face with the Senator, armed with a dagger; he hears the dagger entering his mistress's heart, and she dies smiling upon him, for she has saved his life! She is very fortunate," continued the duchess, glancing at the prince. "He escapes and hastens



away to take command of the Dalmatians, to conquer the Illyrian shore for his beautiful Venice, where martial glory wins a pardon for him, and where he tastes the joys of domestic life: a home, a winter evening, a young wife, and lovely children who pray to St. Mark under the guidance of an elderly nurse. Yes, for three lire worth of opium, he stocks our empty arsenal, and sees cargoes of merchandise set forth or arrive as they are ordered by or sent from the four quarters of the globe. The power of modern industry no longer produces its marvels in London, but in his Venice, where the hanging gardens of Semiramis are reproduced, and the temple of Jerusalem, and the wonders of Rome. Lastly, he exalts the grandeur of the Middle Ages by the new world of steam, by fresh chefs-d'œuvre produced by the arts, which are fostered once more as Venice fostered them in the old days. Monuments and men crowd one another in his narrow brain, where empires, cities, revolutions, rise and crumble in a few brief hours, and where Venice alone grows ever greater; for the Venice of his dreams has the empire of the seas, two millions of people, the sceptre of all Italy, and undisputed possession of the Mediterranean and the Indies!"

"What a wonderful mechanism is the human brain! what a vast riddle, little understood even by the very men who have made the circuit of it, like Gall!" exclaimed the physician.

"Dear duchess," said Vendramin, "do not forget the last service that my elixir will perform for me. After listening to enrapturing voices, after drinking in music through all my pores, after experiencing the excruciating joys and solving the most ardent passions of Mahomet's paradise, I have arrived at the stage of terrible forebodings. I see now in my dear Venice faces of children

distorted like those of the dying, women covered with horrible wounds, heart-broken and wailing; men torn limb from limb, mangled by the copper sides of ships in collision. I am beginning to see Venice as she is, swathed in crêpe, despoiled, deserted. Pallid phantoms glide through her streets! Already the Austrian troops are scowling, already my blissful dream-life is drawing near to real life; whereas, six months since, real life was my broken slumber, and the life under opium was my life of love and pleasure, of mighty affairs of state. Alas! I am approaching the dawn of the grave, woe is me! where the false and the true unite in a semi-obscurity which is neither day nor night, but which has something of both."

"There is too much patriotism in this head, you see," said the prince, placing his hand on the masses of black hair that surrounded Vendramin's brow.

"Ah! if he loves us," said Massimilla, "he will give up his wretched opium at once."

"I will cure your friend," said the Frenchman.

"Do that and we will love you," said Massimilla; "but, if you do not vilify us on your return to France, we will love you even more. The poor Italians are too exhausted by burdensome dominations to be fairly judged; for we have felt the weight of your hand," she added with a smile.

"It was more generous than Austria's," rejoined the physician sharply.

"Austria squeezes us without giving anything back, and you squeezed us to improve and beautify our cities; you stimulated us by creating armies for us. You expected to keep Italy, and the Austrians expect to lose it — that's the whole difference. They give us a well-being which is stupefying and lethargic like themselves, whereas you

overwhelmed us with your devouring activity. But what does it matter whether one dies from the effect of tonics or of narcotics? it's death all the same, eh, signor doctor!"

"Poor Italy! in my eyes she is like a lovely woman to whom France should offer its services as a protector, and take her for its mistress," said the physician.

"You are not capable of loving us as we would be loved," said the duchess with a smile. "We long to be free, but the freedom I want is not your base, middle-class liberalism which would kill the arts. I want," she said, in a tone that made the whole box jump, "that is to say, it is my aspiration that every Italian republic shall be born anew, with its nobles, its people, and its special liberties for each rank. I would like to see the old aristocratic republics, with their civil strife, with their rivalries which produced the noblest works of art, which created politics, and reared the most illustrious princely families. To extend the influence of a government over a great territory is to belittle it. The Italian republics were the glory of Europe in the Middle Ages. Why did Italy succumb, where the Swiss, her servants, conquered?"

"The Swiss republics," said the Frenchman, "were excellent housewives, intent upon their petty affairs, with no occasion to envy one another; whereas your republics were haughty sovereigns who sold themselves to avoid saluting their neighbors; they have fallen too low ever to rise again. The Guelphs are in the saddle!"

"Do not pity us over much," said the duchess in a tone of superb pride that made the two friends' hearts throb, "we still overshadow you! From the depths of her poverty Italy reigns through the men of talent and genius who swarm in her cities. Unfortunately the majority of our geniuses arrive so rapidly at a thorough understanding of

life, that they bury themselves in laborious enjoyment of it; as for those who choose to play at the depressing game of immortality they are adepts at seizing your gold and meriting your admiration. Yes, in this country, whose degradation is lamented by stupid travellers and hypocritical poets, and whose character is slandered by politicians; in this country, which seems enervated, impotent, falling in ruins, aged rather than old, there are in all ranks mighty geniuses who are putting forth sturdy shoots, just as an old vine puts forth new twigs which bear delicious grapes. This race of former sovereigns still produces kings named Lagrange, Volta, Rasori, Canova, Rossini, Bartolini, Galvani, Vigano, Beccaria, Cicognara, and Corveto. These Italians hold sway at whatever point of human knowledge they take their stand, or govern the art to which they devote themselves. To say nothing of the singers, both men and women, and the instrumental performers who hold Europe spellbound by the extraordinary perfection of their talent, like Taglioni, Paganini, and the rest, Italy still rules the world, which will always flock to adore her. Go to-night to the Florian: you will find in Capraja one of our elect, who is, however, in love with obscurity; no one except my master, Duke Cataneo, has a better understanding of music than he; and for that reason he is called *Il Fanatico*."

After a few moments more of animated conversation between the Frenchman and the duchess, the latter of whom displayed a fine eloquence, the Italians withdrew one by one, to report in all the other boxes that La Cataneo, who was esteemed *una donna di gran spirito*, had vanquished a clever French physician on the subject of Italy. That was the great news of the evening.

When the Frenchman saw that he was left with only the

*“Having put the duchess in her gondola, Emilia awaited  
Vendramin to go with him to the Florian.”*

Massimilla Doni. Page 287.









prince and the duchess, he understood that it was his place to leave them alone, and he took his departure. Massimilla saluted him with an inclination of the head which placed him at such a distance from her that it might have earned her his hatred if he had been able to forget the charm of her speech and her beauty.

Toward the end of the opera, then, Emilio was left alone with the duchess; they joined hands and in that position listened to the duet that brings *Il Barbiere* to a close.

"There is nothing like music to give expression to love," said the duchess, deeply moved by that song of two happy nightingales.

Tears came to Emilio's eyes; Massimilla, sublime with the beauty that shines in Raphael's St. Cecilia, pressed his hand, their knees touched; on her lips there was a kiss in bloom, as it were. The prince saw upon his mistress's burning cheeks a joyous flush like that which quivers on a summer's day above the golden crops; his heart was oppressed by the rushing thither of all his blood; he seemed to be listening to a concert of angel voices, and he would have given his life to feel the desire that the abhorred Clarina had aroused in him at the same hour on the previous day; but he was not even conscious that he had a body. Those tears the unfortunate Massimilla, in her innocence, attributed to the remark that Genovese's cavatina had drawn from her.

"*Carino*," she whispered in his ear, "are n't you as far above amorous declarations as the cause is superior to the effect?"

Having put the duchess in her gondola, Emilio awaited Vendramin to go with him to the Florian.

The café Florian at Venice is an institution impossible to define. The merchants do business together there,

and the lawyers make appointments there for their most difficult consultations. Florian is, at one and the same time, a merchants' exchange, a theatre green-room, a reading-room, a club, and a confessional, and is so well suited to the simplicity of the business methods of the country, that some Venetian wives have no idea what sort of business their husbands are engaged in; for, if they have a letter to write, they write it at the café. Naturally spies abound at the Florian; but their presence sharpens the Venetian wit, which has an opportunity in that place to show the circumspection formerly so famous. Many people pass the whole day there; in fact, the Florian is such a necessity with certain men that they leave the boxes of their friends during the intermissions to look in there and find out what the latest gossip is.

While the two friends walked through the narrow streets of the Merceria, they said nothing, for there were too many people; but when they came out of the square of St. Mark, the prince began: —

“Let us not go into the café yet; let us walk a while. I have something to say to you.”

He told him of his adventure with La Tinti, and of his present situation. Emilio's desperation seemed to Vendramin so near to madness, that he promised him a complete cure if he would give him *carte blanche* with Massimilla. That hope came in the nick of time to prevent Emilio from drowning himself during the night; for, at the thought of the singer, he was conscious of a horrible longing to return to her.

The two friends went to the most retired apartment of the Florian, to listen to the conversation of certain eminent Venetians commenting on the events of the day. The principal topics were, first, the character of Lord Byron,

concerning whom the Venetians were slyly sarcastic; next, Cataneo's attachment to La Tinti, the causes of which were voted inexplicable after they had been explained in twenty different ways; next, the début of Genovese; and, lastly, the contest between the duchess and the French physician.

Duke Cataneo entered the room just as the conversation became passionately musical. He saluted Emilio with perfect courtesy, — a fact which nobody remarked, as it was entirely natural, — and Emilio gravely acknowledged the salute. Cataneo looked about to see if there were any of his acquaintances in the room: he spied Vendramin and bowed to him, then bowed to his banker, a very wealthy patrician, and, lastly, to the man who was speaking at the moment, a famous melomaniac and friend of the Countess Albrizzi, whose manner of life, like that of other habitués of the Florian, was absolutely unknown, so carefully was it concealed: only so much was known of him as he revealed at the café.

It was Capraja, the nobleman of whom the duchess had said a few words to the French physician. He belonged to that class of dreamers who divine everything by the power of their imaginations. Addicted to fanciful theories, he cared as much for renown as for a broken pipe. His life was in harmony with his opinions. Capraja appeared under the *procuraties* about ten in the morning, without any one knowing whence he came. He sauntered and rowed about Venice, smoking cigars. He went regularly to La Fenice, sat in the pit, and in the entr'actes went to the Florian, where he drank three or four cups of coffee a day; the balance of the evening he passed in that salon of the café, which he left about two in the morning. Twelve hundred francs a year sufficed for all his needs; he ate but

one meal at a pastry cook's on the Merceria, who had his dinner ready at a certain hour, on a small table in the rear of his shop. The pastry cook's daughter prepared his stuffed oysters with her own hands, supplied him with cigars, and took care of his money. Following his advice the young woman, although she was very beautiful, would listen to no lover, led a virtuous life, and wore the old-time costume of the Venetian women. That pure-blooded Venetian maid was twelve years old when Capraja became interested in her, and twenty-six when he died. She loved him dearly, although he had never kissed her brow or her hand, and although she had no knowledge whatever of the poor old nobleman's intentions. She had finally assumed the absolute control over him that a mother has over her child. She always told him when to change his linen; the next day he would come without a shirt; she would give him a clean one, which he would carry away and wear the next day. He never looked at a woman, either at the theatre or when he was walking. Although he came of an ancient patrician family, his nobility did not seem to him to be worth an unnecessary word; but in the evening, after midnight, he roused himself from his apathy, talked, and showed that he had noticed everything and listened to every word.

This sluggish Diogenes, incapable of explaining his own doctrines, half-Venetian and half-Turk, was short and stout; he had the pointed nose of a doge, the satirical expression of an inquisitor, and a circumspect but smiling mouth. At his death it was learned that he lived near San-Benedetto, in a hovel. Possessed of two millions in the public funds of Europe, he left also the interest accrued since the original investment in 1814, the whole amounting to an enormous sum, by reason of the rise in the value of

the principal as well as of the accumulation of interest. This fortune he bequeathed to the pastry cook's daughter.

"Genovese," he was saying, "will go a long way. I don't know whether he realizes the purpose of music, or whether he sings by instinct, but he 's the first singer who ever satisfied me. I shall not die without hearing roulades executed as I have often heard them in my dreams, when, on waking, I seemed to see notes flying about in the air. The roulade is the highest expression of the art; it is the arabesque that adorns the finest apartment in the house: a little less, and there is nothing at all; a little more and everything is confused. Intended to arouse a thousand sleeping ideas in your mind, it darts through space, sowing its seeds which, being gathered up by the ears, bloom in the depths of the heart. Believe me, when he painted his St. Cecilia Raphael gave music priority over poetry; and he was right: music is addressed to the heart, while written words are addressed to the intelligence only; music communicates its ideas directly, after the manner of perfumes. The singer's voice strikes not our thought, not the memories of our joys, but the elements of thought, and sets in motion the very sources of our sensations. It is to be deplored that the common herd has forced our composers to affix their expression to words, to artificial things; but it is true that, otherwise, they would not be understood by the crowd. The roulade, then, is the only point left the friends of pure music, the lovers of art unadorned. As I listened to that final cavatina to-night, I fancied that I was beckoned by a lovely girl who made me young again with a single glance; the enchantress placed a wreath on my head and led me to the ivory gate through which one enters the mysterious land of Reverie. I owe it to Genovese that I laid aside my old wrappings for a few moments,

brief as measured by a watch but long as measured by my sensations. During a whole springtime perfumed by roses, I was young and beloved!"

"You are mistaken, *Caro Capraja*," said the duke, "there is a more magical power in music than that of the roulade."

"What is that?" demanded Capraja.

"The harmony of two voices, or of one voice and the violin, whose tone approaches the human voice more nearly than that of any other instrument," replied the duke. "Such a perfect harmony carries us farther into the centre of life, on the stream of elements which rekindles our desires, and which bears man on to the heart of the luminous sphere where his thought can summon a whole world. You still need a theme, Capraja, but the pure principle is enough for me: you would have the water pass through the engineer's multiplied canals, to fall in dazzling sheets, while I am content with a calm, limpid stream, my eye scans an unruffled sea, I do not fear to embrace infinity!"

"Hush, Cataneo," said Capraja imperiously. "What! do you not see the fairy who, in her swift course through a luminous atmosphere, gathers there, with the golden thread of harmony, the melodious treasures that she tosses to us with a smile? Have you never felt the touch of the magic wand with which she says to Curiosity, 'Arise'? The goddess rises, radiant, from the deep recesses of the brain, she runs to her wonderful compartments, and touches them lightly as an organist touches his keys. Instantly the Memories rush forth, bringing the roses of the past, preserved by divine influence and still fresh. Our young mistress returns and caresses a young man's curls with her white hands; the too full heart overflows

and we see the banks swept by the flower-strewn torrents of love. All the burning bushes of youth blaze and repeat their divine words, once heard and understood! And the voice flows on; in its swift evolutions it encircles those receding horizons and contracts them; they disappear, overshadowed by new ones, by more intense joys — the joys of an unknown future to which the fairy points with her finger as she flies up into the blue sky.”

“And you,” rejoined Cataneo, “did the direct beam of a star never open before you the upper abysses, and did you never ascend upon that beam which bears you heavenward amid the elements that move the worlds?”

So far as all the auditors were concerned, the duke and Capraja were playing a game the terms of which were unknown.

“Genovese’s voice seizes the fibres of the heart,” said Capraja.

“And La Tinti’s attacks the blood,” said the duke.

“What a paraphrase of happy love in that cavatina!” continued Capraja. “Ah! he was a young man, was Rossini, when he wrote that theme for effervescent pleasure! My heart filled with fresh blood, a thousand desires snapped and crackled in my veins. Never did more angelic sounds set me free more completely from my corporeal bonds! never did the fairy display lovelier arms, or smile more amorously, or lift her skirt more prettily to her knee, raising the curtain behind which my other life is hidden!”

“To-morrow, my old friend,” rejoined the duke, “you shall mount a dazzling swan who will show you the most bountiful of lands; you shall see the springtime as children see it. Your heart will receive the radiance of a new sun; you shall lie on red silk, beneath the eyes of a Madonna;

you shall be even as a happy lover indolently caressed by a Venus whose bare feet are still visible, and who will soon disappear. The swan will be Genovese's voice, if it is capable of uniting with its Leda, the voice of La Tinti. To-morrow we are to have *Moses*, the most stupendous opera that the greatest genius in Italy has ever brought forth."

The others let the duke and Capraja monopolize the conversation, not choosing to be the dupes of a verbose mystification. Only Vendramin and the French physician listened to them for a while. The opium-smoker understood their poetic symbolism; he had the key of the palace in which those two voluptuous imaginations were walking. The physician tried hard to understand and succeeded; for he belonged to that galaxy of remarkable geniuses of the Parisian school, from which the true physician comes forth a no less profound metaphysician than accomplished analyst.

"Do you understand them?" Emilio asked Vendramin, as they left the café about two in the morning.

"Yes, dear Emilio," Vendramin replied, taking his friend home with him. "Those two men belong to the legion of pure spirits who can divest themselves of their wrappings of flesh, and can ride the body of the queen of witches through the azure skies where the sublime wonders of mental life are unrolled: in art they go to the same place to which your intense love leads you, and to which my opium transports me. They cannot be understood except by their peers. I — for my mind is so exalted by a deplorable means that I can crowd a hundred years of life into a single night — I can understand those great minds when they talk of the magnificent country called the land of Chimæras by those who deem themselves wise men; and called



the country of realities by us, who are considered mad. Well, the duke and Capraja, who used to be acquainted at Naples, where Cataneo was born, are music-mad."

"But what was the extraordinary theory that Capraja was trying to explain to Cataneo?" queried the prince. "You say you understand everything — did you understand that?"

"Yes," replied Vendramin. "Capraja has become intimately acquainted with a musician from Cremona, who lives in the Capello palace, and who believes that the notes come in contact in our brains with a substance analogous to that which produces the phenomena of light, and which in us produces ideas. According to him, man has internal keys upon which musical notes act, and which correspond with our nerve-centres whence our sensations and our thoughts proceed. Capraja, who looks upon the arts as a collection of instrumentalities whereby man can bring external nature into harmony within himself with a wonder-working nature which he calls inward life, has adopted the ideas of that instrument-maker, who is at present composing an opera. Imagine a sublime creation wherein the marvels of visible creation are reproduced with a grandeur, a lightness of touch, a rapidity, and a lavishness that cannot be measured, wherein the sensations are without bounds, and which is open to certain privileged spirits who possess a divine power — then you will have some idea of the ecstatic raptures of which Capraja and Cataneo, who are poets to none but themselves, were talking just now. But in like manner, with respect to our mental organization, when a man has passed beyond the spheres in which plastic works are produced by the process of imitations, and has entered the wholly intellectual realm of moral abstractions where everything is examined in its elements and

viewed in connection with the omnipotence of results, that man can no longer be understood by ordinary intellects."

"You have described my love for Massimilla," said Emilio. "My dear fellow, there is a power within me that rouses in the fire of her glances, at her slightest touch, and casts me into a world of light where effects are produced that I have never dared to tell you of. It has often seemed to me that the delicate tissue of her skin leaves the imprint of a flower on mine when her hand rests on my hand. Her words respond to those interior keys of which you speak. Desire stirs my brain by setting in motion that invisible world, instead of stirring my sluggish body; and thereupon the air turns red and sparkles, strange perfumes of indescribable power relax my nerves, the walls of my brain are hung with roses, and it is as if all my arteries were opened and my blood flowing away, my languor is so complete."

"That is the way my opium acts," returned Vendramin.

"In heaven's name do you want to die?" asked Emilio in dismay.

"With Venice," said Vendramin, extending his hand toward St. Mark's. "Can you see a single one of those bell-towers and spires that is straight? Don't you understand that the sea is going to demand its prey sooner or later?"

The prince hung his head, and dared not say more of love to his friend. One must travel among conquered nations to learn what a free country is.

When they arrived at the Vendramini palace, the prince and Marco spied a gondola at the water-gate. Thereupon the prince put his arm about his friend's waist and embraced him fondly, saying:—

"A pleasant night, dear boy!"

"A woman for me, when I sleep with Venice!" cried Vendramin.

At that moment the gondolier, who was leaning against a pillar, looked at the two friends, recognized the one who had been described to him, and said in the prince's ear:—

"The duchess, monsignore."

Emilio leaped into the gondola, where he was seized by powerful but supple arms, and pulled down upon cushions where he could feel the heaving breast of an amorous woman. Instantly the prince ceased to be Emilio and became La Tinti's lover, for his sensations were so bewildering that he fell back as if stupefied by the first kiss.

"Forgive me for this trick, my love," said the Sicilian. "I should die if I did n't take you home with me!"

And the gondola flew over the discreet waters.

## V.

THE next evening, at half after seven, all the spectators were in the same seats as before, except the patrons of the pit who always sat where they could. Old Capraja was in Cataneo's box. Before the overture the duke paid the duchess a visit; he made it a point to sit behind her and to leave Emilio at the front of the box, beside Massimilla. He said a few meaningless sentences, free from sarcasm or bitterness, and with as polished a manner as if he were calling upon a stranger.

Despite his efforts to appear amiable and natural, the prince could not change the expression of his countenance, which was terribly careworn. The indifferent might attribute to jealousy such a transformation of his usually calm features. The duchess evidently shared his emotion, for her face wore a listless expression, and she was visibly depressed.

The duke, being sadly out of countenance between two such unamiable companions, took advantage of the Frenchman's arrival to leave the box.

"Signore," he said to his physician before he dropped the portière, "you are about to hear a magnificent musical poem that is rather hard to comprehend at a first hearing; but I leave you with the duchess, who can interpret it better than any one else, for she is my pupil."

The doctor, like the duke, was struck by the expression of the lovers' faces, which indicated an unhealthy sort of despair.

"Does an Italian opera require a cicerone, pray?" he asked the duchess, with a smile.

Reminded by the question of her duties as mistress of the box, she tried to dispel the clouds that overhung her brow, and replied, eagerly grasping at a subject of conversation in which she could give vent to her inward irritation.

"It's not an opera, monsieur, but an oratorio, a work which in reality resembles one of our most magnificent buildings, and in which I will gladly be your guide. Believe me, it will be none too much if you give our great Rossini your most intelligent attention, for one must be poet and musician at once to grasp the full meaning of such music. You belong to a nation whose language and whose genius are too positive for it to enter without preparation into the realm of music; but, on the other hand, France is too comprehensive not to end by loving it, and cultivating it, and you will succeed in that as you do in everything. Moreover, you must realize that music as created by Lulli, Rameau, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Cimarosa, Paesello and Rossini, and as it will be continued by the great geniuses of the future, is a new art, unknown to past generations, who had fewer instruments than we have now, and who knew nothing of harmony, upon which the flowers of melody rely to-day, as upon fertile soil. An art so new requires study on the part of the masses — study that will develop the sentiments to which music appeals. That sentiment scarcely exists among your Frenchmen, who are engrossed by philosophic theories, analysis, learned discussions, and always disturbed by internal dissensions. Modern music, which demands profound peace, is the language of tender, loving hearts, predisposed to a noble inward enthusiasm. This language, a

thousand times richer than that of mere words, is to ordinary language what the thought is to the spoken word. It awakens ideas and sensations in the same form in which they first come into being with us, but leaves them as they are in each person. This power over our inward life is one of the grandeurs of music. The other arts force definite creations upon our attention; music is infinite in its creations. We are obliged to accept the poet's ideas, the painter's picture, the sculptor's statue; but each one of us interprets music at the pleasure of his grief or his joy, his hopes or his despair. Where the other arts confine our thoughts by fixing them upon a definite thing, music turns them loose upon all nature, which it is able to describe to us. I will tell you how I interpret Rossini's *Moses*."

She leaned toward the physician so that no one else could hear what she said.

"Moses is the liberator of an enslaved nation!" she continued; "remember that suggestion, and you will see with what religious hope the whole theatre will listen to the prayer of the Hebrews released from bondage, and with what thunderous applause it will reply to it."

Emilio retreated to the back of the box just as the conductor raised his bow. The duchess looked at the physician and pointed at the chair left vacant by the prince, to bid him take it. But the Frenchman was more curious to know what had taken place between the lovers than to enter the musical palace erected by the man whom all Italy was wildly applauding at the moment, for it was the period of Rossini's triumph in his own country. The Frenchman watched the duchess, who spoke under the influence of great nervous excitement and reminded him of the statue of Niobe he had lately admired in Florence:

the same noble bearing in grief, the same physical impassiveness; but the heart cast a reflection upon the warm coloring of her complexion, and her eyes, wherein a gleam of pride overcame the expression of languor, dried their tears by a glowing fire. Her restrained suffering became less acute when she looked at Emilio, who did not take his eyes from her face. It was easy to see that she was seeking to soothe an attack of wild despair. The plight of her heart imparted an indefinable touch of grandeur to her spirit. Like most women when they are hurried on by extraordinary excitement, she departed from her ordinary limits and revealed something of the pythoress, maintaining none the less her majesty and grandeur, for it was the form of her ideas, and not her face, that was writhing in desperation. Perhaps she was desirous to put forth all her intelligence in order to make life attractive to her lover and to keep him alive.

When the orchestra had played the three chords in C major which the master placed at the beginning of his work to signify that the overture would be sung, — for the real overture is the immense theme extending from that abrupt beginning to the moment when the light appears at Moses' command, — the duchess could not repress a convulsive movement which showed how thoroughly that music was in harmony with her hidden suffering.

"How those three chords freeze your blood!" she said. "You anticipate a scene of sorrow. Listen closely to this introduction, the subject of which is the terrible lamentation of a people stricken by the hand of God. What moans! The king, the queen, their oldest son, the great men, the whole people, are lamenting; they are assailed in their pride, in their conquests, checked in their greed. Dear Rossini, you did well to toss this bone to the Tedeschi

to gnaw at, when they denied you the gifts of harmony and learning! Now you will hear the fateful melody which the master has introduced into this learned harmonic composition, which may fittingly be compared to the most complicated German music, but which causes our minds neither fatigue nor ennui. You Frenchmen, who recently achieved the most bloody of revolutions, in which the aristocracy was crushed under the paws of the popular lion, — on the day when this oratorio is performed in your country, you will understand this sublime lamentation of the victims of a God who avenges his people. None but an Italian could compose such a fruitful, inexhaustible and wholly Dantesque theme. Do you think that it is nothing to dream of vengeance even for a moment? To your knees, you old German masters, Händel, Sebastian Bach, and yourself, Beethoven: behold the queen of the arts, behold triumphant Italy!”

The duchess had time to say thus much during the raising of the curtain. Thereupon the physician heard the sublime symphony with which the composer opens that vast biblical episode. It is concerned with the grief of a whole people. Grief is unvarying in its expression, especially when it is a matter of physical suffering. So that, after he had instinctively divined, like all men of genius, that there must be no variety in the ideas expressed, the composer, having once found his leading *motif*, developed it from key to key, grouping the choruses and his leading characters about that *motif*, by modulations and cadences of marvellous flexibility. His power is manifest in his very simplicity. The effect of the *motif* in question, which depicts the suffering caused by cold and darkness among a people accustomed to be bathed by the luminous waves of the sun, and which the people and their rulers repeat



again and again, is most impressive. There is a something pitiless in that slow musical movement. The novel, grief-stricken strain is like an iron bar in the hands of a heavenly executioner, who lets it fall upon the limbs of all those victims in regular time. By dint of hearing it pass from C minor to G minor, then go back to C, only to return to the dominant G, and begin again fortissimo on the tonic E flat, pass thence to F major, and return at last to C minor, ever increasingly laden with terror and cold and gloom, the spectator's mind ends by sharing the impressions conveyed by the music.

Thus the Frenchman felt the most intense emotion when there came the explosion of all those sorrows combined: —

“O Nume d'Israel,  
Se brami in libertà  
Il popol tuo fedel,  
Di lui, di noi pietà!”

(O God of Israel, if it is thy will that thy faithful people go forth from bondage, vouchsafe to take pity upon them and upon us!)

“Never before was there so vast a combination of natural details, so complete an idealization of nature. In great national disasters, each individual laments a long while by himself; then cries of grief more or less violent arise here and there from the mass; and finally, when the suffering has come home to all, it bursts forth like a tempest. Once agreed concerning their common wound, the people pass from dull wailing to impatient outcries. Rossini has followed that course. After the explosion in C major, Pharaoh sings his sublime recitative, *Mano ultrice di un Dio!* (O avenging God, too late I recognize thee!) Thereupon the original *motif* assumes a more acute tone: all Egypt summons Moses to its aid.”

The duchess had taken advantage of the interval necessitated by the arrival of Moses and Aaron to explain thus that fine passage.

"Let them weep!" she continued passionately; "they did enough harm. Expiate, Egyptians, the sins of your infatuated court! With what skill the great painter has employed all the subdued tones of music, and all the melancholy to be found on the musical palette! What cold darkness! what mists! Is not your heart in mourning? are you not convinced of the reality of the black clouds that darken the stage? Do not the densest shadows seem to you to enshroud all nature? There are neither Egyptian palaces, nor palm trees, nor landscapes. Therefore what balm will they not pour upon the soul, the deeply religious notes of the divine physician who will speedily heal that cruel sore! How everything leads up to Moses' magnificent invocation to God! Following out a line of scientific reasoning which Capraja will explain to you, this invocation is accompanied only by brass instruments. They give it its wonderful religious coloring. Not only is that device admirably successful here, but observe again how fertile genius is in resources; Rossini has extracted new beauties from the very obstacle that he placed in his own path. He was able to reserve the stringed instruments to indicate when the day is about to succeed the darkness, and thus to attain one of the most potent effects known in music. Who, before this inimitable genius, ever made such use of recitative? There has not been an aria or a duet yet. The poet has sustained himself by the power of thought, by the vividness of his images, by the truth of his declamation. This scene of grief, this profound darkness, these shrieks of despair, this whole musical picture, is as fine as your great Poussin's *Deluge*."

Moses waved his wand and the day appeared.

"See, monsieur, how the music contends here with the sun, whose brilliancy it has borrowed, and with all nature, whose phenomena it reproduces to the most trivial details," the duchess continued in an undertone. "Here art reaches its apogee, no composer will ever go further. Do you hear Egypt waking after its long lethargy? Happiness finds its way everywhere with the daylight. In what work, of antiquity or of the present time, will you find such a glorious page, — the most delirious joy contrasted with the most profound sadness? What shrieks! what frisking notes! how joyously the oppressed soul breathes again! What frenzy! Hear the tremolo in the orchestra! What a fine ensemble! It is the joy of a rescued people! Are you not quivering with pleasure?"

The physician, marvelling at the contrast, — one of the most magnificent in all modern music,—clapped his hands, carried away by admiration.

"Brava, la Doni!" exclaimed Vendramin, who had been listening.

"The introduction is finished," the duchess continued. "You have just experienced a powerful sensation," she said to the physician; "your heart is beating fast; you have seen in the depths of your imagination the most brilliant sun inundating with its oceans of light a whole country but now cold and gloomy. Learn now how the musician has achieved this result, so that you may admire him tomorrow in the secret resources of his genius, after undergoing his influence to-day. What do you make of this passage of the sunrise — so diversified, so brilliant, so complete? It consists of a simple chord in C, repeated again and again, varied only by a chord of *quart de sixte*. That is where the magic of his method bursts upon you.

To describe the arrival of the light, he takes the same method he employed to depict the darkness and lamentation. This dawn expressed in images is exactly like a natural dawn. Light is a single unalterable substance, everywhere like to itself, and its effects are varied only by the objects it comes in contact with — is n't that true? Well, the composer selected for the groundwork of his music a single *motif*, a simple chord in C. The sun appears first and casts its beams on the hilltops and then into the valleys. In like manner the chord begins on the first string of the first violins with a chill softness; it spreads through the orchestra and is taken up by all the instruments one by one. As the light extends, illuminating objects nearer and nearer at hand, it arouses each source of melody, until all blend in the ensemble. The violins, which you had not heard before, give the signal with their soft tremolo, vaguely quivering like the first luminous waves. That pretty, joyous movement which caressed your very soul, the composer has interspersed with bass chords, produced by a sort of flourish on the horns, confined to their lowest notes, in order to describe the last chill shadows that darken the valleys while the first beams are playing about the summits. Then the wind instruments join in softly, strengthening the general harmony. The voices take part with signs of gladness and amazement. And finally the brasses ring out brilliantly and the trumpets blare. Light the source of harmony, has inundated nature, and all the treasures of music are thereupon poured forth with an intensity and a splendor like that of the rays of the Eastern sun. There is not an instrument, even the humble triangle, whose repetition of the one note, C, does not remind you of the song of the birds in the morning, by its shrill tone, and its impish persistence.

The same key, elaborated by that masterhand, describes the joy of all nature in allaying the grief that but a moment before tore your heart. There is the stamp of the great master — unity! It is one and various. A single phrase, and innumerable tokens of sorrow — the misery of a whole nation; a single chord, and all the diverse sentiments of nature at its awakening — all the joyous acclamations of a whole people. These two wonderful pages are welded together by an appeal to the ever-living God, the author of all things, of that grief as well as of that joy. Is not this introduction in itself a great poem?"

"It is, in truth," replied the Frenchman.

"Now there comes a quintette, of the sort that Rossini alone has the skill to compose; if he has ever allowed himself to be inveigled into the sweet and facile sensuality for which our Italian music is blamed, it surely is in this pretty passage, in which every one is supposed to give expression to his lightness of heart, in which the enslaved people is set free, and in which nevertheless we hear the sighing of an imperilled love. Pharaoh's son loves a Jewess, and the Jewess abandons him. What makes this quintette especially delicious and captivating is the return to the ordinary emotions of life, after the imposing description of the two vaster national and natural scenes, wretchedness and happiness, set off by the magical effect produced by the divine vengeance and the marvel-working of the Bible. — Was I not right?" she continued, at the conclusion of the magnificent *stretto*, —

"Voci di giubilo  
D'in' orno echeggino,  
Di pace l'Iride  
Per noi spunto."

(What cries of joy arise about us; the star of peace sheds its brilliance for us.)

“How skilfully the composer constructed that passage!” she resumed after a pause, during which she waited for a reply; “he began with a horn solo of divine sweetness, accompanied by harps; for the first voices that are heard in this grand concert are those of Moses and Aaron when they offer thanks to the true God; their song, soft and grave, recalls the sublime thoughts of the invocation, yet is in unison with the joy of the common people. There is in this transition something celestial and something terrestrial, which genius alone can produce, and which gives to the *andante* of the quintette a color which I should compare with that which Titian paints about the divine persons in his pictures. Did you notice the exquisite intermingling of the voices? How cleverly the composer has grouped them about the charming phrases played by the orchestra! How skilfully he leads up to the joyous measures of his *allegro*! Did you not imagine that you saw the dancing choruses, the frenzied jubilation of a people escaped from danger? And when the clarinet gives the signal for the *stretto*, *Voci di giubilo*, so lively and brilliant, did you not feel in your very soul the rhythmic movement of the consecrated dance of which David speaks in his Psalms, as performed by the hills?”

“Yes, it would make a fine air for a contra-dance,” said the physician.

“French! French! always French!” cried the duchess, arrested at the height of her enthusiasm by that biting remark. “Yes, you are capable of employing that sublime outburst, so stately with all its jocundity, for your rigadoons. A sublimely poetic thought never obtains favor in your eyes. The most exalted genius, saints, kings, great disasters, everything that is most sacred, has to run the gauntlet of your caricature! The vulgarization of

great thoughts by introducing them in your jigs is caricature in music. With you the wit kills sentiment, just as argumentation kills sense."

The whole box sat silent during the recitative of Osiris and Membré, who plot to thwart the order to depart, issued by Pharaoh in favor of the Hebrews.

"Have I offended you?" the physician asked the duchess; "I should be profoundly grieved if it were so. Your words are like a magic wand: they open compartments in my brain and release new and unfamiliar ideas, inspired by this sublime music."

"No," she replied. "You praised our great composer after your fashion. Rossini will succeed in France, I can see, by virtue of his intellectual and sensuous qualities. Let us hope that there are in your fertile country some few noble souls, in love with the ideal, who will appreciate the elevation, the stateliness of such music. Ah! now comes the famous duo between Elcia and Osiris," she continued, taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by the triple outburst of applause with which the pit greeted *La Tinti*, who made her first appearance. "If *La Tinti* has thoroughly grasped the rôle of Elcia, you are about to hear the sublime song of a woman torn at once by love of country and by love for one of her oppressors; whereas Osiris, inflamed with a mad passion for his lovely captive, does his utmost to detain her. The opera is based no less upon this great theme than upon the resistance of the Pharaohs to the power of God and of liberty, and you must accustom yourself to it or run the risk of not understanding this tremendous work at all. Despite the disfavor with which you accept the plots of our writers of librettos, allow me to call your attention to the art with which this drama is constructed. The antagonism essential for every great

work, and which is so propitious to the development of the music, is present here. What more fruitful theme than a people longing for liberty, detained in chains by bad faith, sustained by God, and heaping prodigies upon prodigies in order to become free? What more dramatic than the prince's love for a Jewess, which almost justifies the treachery of the tyrannical oppressor? And yet all this is expressed in this bold, far-reaching musical poem, wherein Rossini has succeeded in imparting to each people its singular nationality — for we have attributed to them an historic grandeur which all imaginations have accepted. The songs of the Hebrews and their trust in God are constantly contrasted with the cries of rage and the struggles of Pharaoh, who is depicted in the fulness of his power. At this moment Osiris, absorbed by his love, still hopes to detain his mistress by reminding her of all the sweet joys of passion; he tries to prevail over the allurements of her fatherland. So that you will recognize the divine languor, the honeyed ardor, the endearments, the voluptuous memories of oriental love, in Osiris's *Ah! se puoi così lasciarmi!* ('If you have the heart to leave me, break my heart'); and in Elcia's reply: *Ma perchè così straziarmi!* ('Why torture me thus, for my grief is terrible!') — No, two hearts so melodiously united could never part," she said, glancing at the prince. "But see — the lovers are suddenly interrupted by the triumphant voice of the fatherland thundering in the distance, and summoning Elcia. What a heavenly and delicious allegro — this *motif* of the march of the Hebrews en route to the desert! Only Rossini can make clarinets and trumpets say so much! An art which can describe in two measures all that one's country stands for is surely nearer heaven than other arts, is it not? That trumpet-call always moves me



so deeply that I cannot tell you what agony it must be for those who are slaves and in chains to see others who are free go their way!"

The duchess's eyes were wet as she listened to that magnificent *motif*, which does in truth dominate the whole opera.

"*Dov'è mai quel core amante!* ('What loving heart does not share my anguish?')" she continued in Italian, when La Tinti began the beautiful cantilena of the *stretto* in which she implores compassion for her woes. "But what is happening? The pit is beginning to mutter."

"Genovese is braying like a stag," said the prince.

The duet — the first in which La Tinti sang — was, in fact, ruined by Genovese's utter failure. As soon as the tenor began to sing with La Tinti, his beautiful voice seemed to change. His judicious method, that method which recalled both Crescentini and Veluti, he seemed to forget at pleasure. Sometimes an unseasonable *tenuto*, or a too prolonged flourish, spoiled his effect. Sometimes sudden outbursts, the notes hurled forth like water rushing through a suddenly opened sluiceway, indicated an absolute and wilful disregard of the laws of taste. So that the pit was immeasurably excited. The Venetians believed that Genovese had made a wager with some of his comrades. La Tinti was recalled and frantically applauded, and Genovese received several warnings which advised him of the hostile disposition of the pit.

During the episode, decidedly entertaining to a Frenchman, of the continued recalls of La Tinti, who returned eleven times alone to receive the frenzied plaudits of the audience, — for Genovese, who had almost been hissed, dared not accompany her, — the physician made a remark to the duchess concerning the *stretto* of the duet.

"Rossini should express in this duet," he said, "the most profound sorrow, but it seems to me that there is a devil-may-care manner about it, a strain of gaiety altogether out of season."

"You are quite right," the duchess replied. "That fault is the result of one of those tyrannical circumstances which our composers have to reckon with. He was thinking more of his prima donna than of Elcia, when he wrote that *stretto*. But to-day, even if La Tinti should execute it still more brilliantly, I am so in tune with the situation that that over-joyous passage is full of sadness to me."

The physician closely scrutinized the prince and the duchess in turn, but could not guess what it was that kept them apart and had made that duet heartrending to them both. Massimilla lowered her voice and said in the Frenchman's ear: —

"You are about to hear a magnificent passage — Pharaoh's conspiracy against the Hebrews. The majestic air, *A rispettar mi apprenda!* ('Let him learn to respect me!') is the triumph of Carthagenova, who will give us a marvellous rendering of wounded pride and the duplicity of courts. The throne is about to speak: it retracts the concessions it has made, it gives a free rein to its wrath. Pharaoh stands erect and pounces upon the prey that is escaping him. Rossini has never written anything else so fine, or so instinct with overflowing strength and vigor. It is a complete work in itself, supported by an accompaniment of marvellous workmanship, like the least important portions of this opera, in which the power of youth shines in the smallest details."

The plaudits of the whole theatre crowned that beautiful passage, which was admirably rendered by the singer, and especially well understood by the Venetians.

“Now the finale,” continued the duchess. “Again you hear that march, inspired by the joy of deliverance and by the faith in God which enables a whole people to go forth joyously into the desert! What lungs would not be refreshed by the celestial enthusiasm of that people on going out of bondage! Ah! dear, living melodies! All honor to the genius who has had the art to interpret so many sentiments! There is a something warlike in that march, which says that the people has the God of armies on its side! What profound meaning in those measures overflowing with prayers for mercies! The images of the Bible stir in our souls, and in this divine operatic work we are actually present at one of the greatest scenes of an ancient and imposing society. The religious solemnity of some of the vocal parts, the way the voices join in one after another, express all that we imagine of the sacred wonders of that first age of mankind. And yet this fine concerted number is simply a development of the *motif* of the march in all its musical results. That *motif* is the fruitful element for both orchestra and voices, for the singing and for the brilliant instrumentation that accompanies it. Now Elcia joins the crowd, and Rossini causes her to give expression to her regrets in order to shade down the joyousness of the passage. Hear her duettino with Amenofi. Did ever wounded love give itself utterance in such strains? They have all the charm of a nocturne; they express the secret grieving of wounded love. What utter melancholy! Ah! the desert will be twice a desert to her! Now at last comes the terrible contest between the Egyptians and the Hebrews! the jocund march, all that lightness of heart is thrown into confusion by the arrival of the Egyptians. The promulgation of Pharaoh’s decree is announced by a musical theme that dominates the finale — a low, solemn

*motif*; one seems to hear the tramp of the mighty armies of Egypt surrounding the consecrated phalanx of God, encompassing it slowly, as a long African serpent envelops its victim. What charm in the lamentations of the deceived nation! Is it not more Italian than Hebrew? What a magnificent movement until the arrival of Pharaoh, when the leaders of the two nations and all the passions of the drama stand face to face! What an admirable blending of sentiments in the sublime octette, where Moses' wrath and that of the two Pharaohs come in collision! What a struggle of unchained voices and angry passions! Never was a vaster subject offered to a composer. The famous finale of *Don Giovanni* presents, after all, simply a libertine confronted with his victims, who invoke the vengeance of Heaven; whereas here earth and its powers are striving to contend against God. Two peoples, one weak, the other strong, are face to face. And so, as he had at his disposal all the necessary elements, Rossini employed them with marvellous art. Without making himself ridiculous, he succeeded in expressing all the stages of a fierce tempest, with snatches of horrible imprecations. He accomplished it by a succession of chords played to a measure in three-time with a sombre musical vigor, with a persistence that finally masters you. The frenzy of the Egyptians surprised by a rain of fire, the Hebrew shrieks of vengeance, called for skilfully arranged choruses; so you see how he made the development of the orchestral parts go hand-in-hand with the choruses. The *allegro assai* in C minor is terrible in the midst of that deluge of fire. You must admit," added the duchess, when Moses, raising his staff, called down the fiery rain, a passage in which the composer puts forth all his power both in the orchestra and on the stage,—“you must admit that

music never expressed disturbance and confusion more skilfully."

"It has captured the pit," said the Frenchman.

"But what is happening? The pit is tremendously excited," replied the duchess.

In the finale Genovese had made such a ridiculous exhibition, gazing at La Tinti all the while, that the tumult was at its height in the pit, whose enjoyment was sadly marred. There is nothing more offensive to Italian ears than that sort of a contrast between good and bad. The manager decided to go before the curtain, and said that, when he remonstrated with his "first man," il Signor Genovese declared that he had no idea wherein or how he had lost the favor of the audience just when he was doing his utmost to attain perfection in his art.

"Let him be bad the way he was yesterday and we shall be satisfied!" exclaimed Capraja in a voice trembling with rage.

This apostrophe restored good humor in the pit. Contrary to the Italian custom, little heed was paid to the ballet. In all the boxes nothing was talked about but Genovese's strange conduct and the unhappy manager's address. Those who had the entrée of the wings flocked thither to learn the secret of the comedy, and soon the all-engrossing subject of conversation was a shocking scene between La Tinti and her comrade Genovese, in which the prima donna charged the tenor with being jealous of her success, with having embarrassed her by his absurd conduct, and with having tried even to destroy her self-possession by feigning a passion for her. The singer wept hot tears at that misfortune. She had hoped, she said, to please her lover, who was to be in the theatre and whom she had not been able to discover.

One must be familiar with the placid life of the Venetians, which is so free from happenings that they discuss a slight tiff between two lovers or a temporary falling-off in a singer's voice, as if they were of as much weight as political affairs assume in England, to realize the excitement at La Fenice and the café Florian. La Tinti in love, La Tinti failing to put forth all her powers, the madness of Genovese, or his base practical joke, inspired by the artistic jealousy which Italians understand so well — what a rich mine of lively discussions! The whole pit chattered, as men chatter on the Bourse, and the result was an uproar which must have astounded a Frenchman accustomed to the calm atmosphere of the Parisian theatres. All the boxes were in commotion, like hives of swarming bees.

There was but one man who took no part in the tumult. Emilio Memmi turned his back to the stage, and with his eyes fastened sadly on Massimilla, seemed to live only in her glance; he had not once looked at the singer.

"There is no need, *caro carino*, for me to ask the result of my negotiation," said Vendramin to him. "Your Massimilla, so pure and so religious, was sublimely compliant — in short she was a La Tinti?"

The prince replied by a shake of the head instinct with a ghastly melancholy.

"Your love has not abandoned the ethereal peaks over which you soar," continued Vendramin, excited by opium; "it has not become materialized. This morning, as for six months past, you inhaled the odor of flowers opening their fragrant blossoms beneath the arches of your brain grown immeasurably greater. Your swollen heart received all your blood, and flung itself up to your throat. And here," he said, placing his hand upon

Emilio's breast, "enrapturing sensations woke to life. Massimilla's voice flowed in in waves of light, her hand set free a thousand imprisoned desires which quitted the recesses of your brain to gather vaporously about you, and to bear you aloft, light of body and bathed in purple rays, into an azure atmosphere above snow-capped mountains where dwells the spotless love of the angels. The smile and the kisses of her lips swathed you in a venomous robe which consumed the last traces of your earthly nature. Her eyes were two stars that transformed you into light without shadow. You were like two angels prostrate on the heavenly palms, waiting till the gates of Paradise should open; but they turned complainingly on their hinges, and in your impatience you struck at them but could not reach them. Your hand met naught but clouds swifter than your desire. Crowned with white roses, and like unto a celestial betrothed, your luminous beloved wept at your frenzy. Perchance she was repeating melodious prayers to the Virgin, while the infernal lusts of earth whispered their infamous suggestions in your ears; you disdained then the divine fruit of that ecstatic state in which I live at the risk of my life."

"Your intoxication, dear Vendramin," said Emilio calmly, "falls short of the reality. Who could describe in words that purely corporeal languor which results from over-indulgence in the pleasures we have dreamed of, and which leaves to the soul its never-ending desire, to the mind its faculties unimpaired? But I am weary of this torture which helps me to understand what Tantalus suffered. Last night was the last of my nights. Having made my final effort, I will restore the child to its mother: the Adriatic will receive my last breath."

"What an idiot!" returned Vendramin; "but no, you

are mad, for madness, that critical state which we despise, is the memory of a prior state which distorts our present shape. The genius of my dreams has told me these things and many others! You would combine the duchess and La Tinti; but I say take them separately, my Emilio — that will be more prudent. Raphael alone has combined form and idea. You would fain be a Raphael in love; but one does not create chance. Raphael is a hindrance to the Eternal Father, who created form and idea as foes; otherwise, nothing would live. When the cause is stronger than the result, there is no product. We must be either on earth or in heaven. Remain in heaven, you will always come to earth too soon."

"I will take the duchess home," said the prince, "and I will risk my last effort. Afterward?"

"Afterward," said Vendramin earnestly, "promise to come to the Florian for me."

"Yes."

This conversation, carried on in modern Greek between Vendramin and the prince, both of whom were familiar with that tongue, as many Venetians are, was not understood by the duchess and the Frenchman. Although entirely outside the circle of interest which surrounded the duchess, Emilio, and Vendramin, — for all three understood one another perfectly by means of the glances they exchanged: shrewd, incisive, veiled, and oblique in turn, — the Frenchman eventually detected a part of the truth. A fervent entreaty addressed by the duchess to Vendramin had dictated to the young man his suggestion to Emilio, for she had caught the scent of the torture her lover was undergoing in the pure atmosphere in which he strayed, albeit she had not scented La Tinti.

"Those two young men are mad," said the physician.



"As for the prince," rejoined the duchess, "leave it to me to cure him; as for Vendramin, if he has n't listened to this sublime music, it may well be that he's incurable."

"If you would tell me the cause of their madness, I would cure them," said the physician.

"When did great physicians cease to be seers?" asked the duchess jocosely.

The ballet had come to an end long since; the second act of *Moses* was beginning, and the pit was most attentive. The report had circulated that Duke Cataneo had lectured Genovese, impressing upon him how he was injuring Clarina, the *diva* of the day. Every one expected a sublime second act.

"The prince and his father open the scene," said the duchess; "they have given way once more, heaping insults on the Hebrews, but they are foaming with rage. The father finds consolation in his son's impending marriage, and the son is in despair at the obstacle which adds mightily to his love, thwarted as it is on all sides. Genovese and Carthagenova are singing splendidly. As you see, the tenor is making his peace with the pit. How well he brings out the richness of the music! The phrase sung by the son on the tonic, repeated by the father on the dominant, is a part of the simple, impressive system upon which this score is based, in which the sobriety of the methods makes the fertility of the music even more surprising. Therein we find Egypt in its entirety. I do not believe there is another modern work which exhales such stately dignity. The solemn and majestic paternity of a king is described in that superb measure, and is in conformity with the grand style characteristic of the whole work. Surely, a Pharaoh's son pouring his grief into his father's bosom

and causing him to share it, cannot be more fitly represented than by these imposing images. Do you not find yourself in accord with us in ascribing such splendor to that ancient monarchy?"

"It is sublime music!" exclaimed the Frenchman.

"The air, *Pace mia smarrita*, which the queen is about to sing, is one of those bravura, artificial airs to which all composers are condemned, and which injure the general plan of the poem; but often their operas would not live if they did not flatter the prima donna's self-esteem. Nevertheless, this musical sweetmeat is treated so broadly that it is given literally in every theatre. It is so brilliant that the singers do not substitute their own favorite airs for it, as they do in most operas. And now comes the most brilliant bit in the whole score, the duo between Elcia and Osiris in the underground passage where he wishes to conceal her, in order to take her away from the departing Hebrews, and to fly with her from Egypt. The lovers are interrupted by the arrival of Aaron, on his way to warn Amaltheus, and we are going to hear the king of quartettes: *Mi manca la voce, mi sento morire*. This *Mi manca la voce* is one of the masterpieces which will endure against everything, even time, that great destroyer of fashions in music, for it is written in that language of the soul which never varies. Mozart has all to himself his famous finale of *Don Giovanni*, Marcello his psalm, *Celi enarrant gloriam Dei*, Cimarosa his *Pria chè spunti*, Beethoven his Symphony in C minor, Pergolese his *Stabat*; Rossini will keep his *Mi manca la voce*. Above all else it is the wonderful facility with which he varies his form that is admirable in Rossini; to obtain this great result, he has recourse to the old-fashioned canon in unison, to bring in his voices and blend them in the same melody. As the

form of these sublime cantilenas was novel, he has set them in an old frame; and the better to place it in relief, he has dropped the orchestra, accompanying the voices with arpeggios executed by the harps alone. It is impossible to show more skill in details or more grandeur in the general effect. — Great heaven! more uproar!” exclaimed the duchess.

Genovese, who had sung his duo with Carthagenova so admirably, returned to his old game with La Tinti. From a great singer, he degenerated to the worst of choristers. There arose the most horrible uproar that ever woke the echoes of La Fenice. It yielded only to the voice of La Tinti, who, enraged by the obstacle raised by Genovese’s obstinacy, sang *Mi manca la voce* as no other singer will ever sing it. The enthusiasm of the audience reached its highest point: the spectators passed from indignation and rage to the most ecstatic enjoyment.

“She pours billows of purple into my soul,” said Capraja, raising his hand as if to bless la diva Tinti.

“May heaven exhaust its blessings upon her head!” cried a gondolier.

“Pharaoh is now about to revoke his orders,” continued the duchess, while the excitement in the pit was subsiding. “Moses will crush him upon his throne by announcing the death of all the first-born of Egypt and singing that aria of vengeance which contains the thunders of Heaven, and in which the Hebrew trumpets resound. But, do not be misled; the aria is one of Pacini’s, which Carthagenova substitutes for Rossini’s. I have no doubt that this aria will remain in the score; it gives the basses too excellent an opportunity to display the richness of their tones, and in this case expression carries the day over science. However, the aria is magnificent with strains of

menace, so that I am not sure that they will allow us to hear it for long."

A salvo of shouts and applause, followed by a profound and prudent silence, greeted the aria; nothing could be more significant, or more Venetian, than that outburst of courage, instantly repressed.

"I will say nothing of the march tempo that announces the coronation of Osiris, by which the father seeks to defy Moses' threats; it is enough to hear it. *Their* famous Beethoven has written nothing more superb. Overflowing with earthly pomp, it forms an admirable contrast to the march of the Hebrews. Compare them, and you will see that in this case the music is incredibly fertile in effects. Elcia declares her love in the face of the two leaders of the Hebrews, and sacrifices it in the wonderful aria, *Porge la destra amata* ('Give to another your beloved hand'). Ah! what torture! Look at the audience!"

"Bravo!" cried the pit when Genovese was struck down.

"Set free from her pitiful companion, we shall hear La Tinti sing: *O desolata Elcia!* the agonizing cavatina in which we hear the cries of a love reproved by God."

"Rossini, where are you, that you cannot hear this magnificent interpretation of what your genius suggested to you?" exclaimed Cataneo. "Is not Clarina his equal?" he asked Capraja. "To vivify those notes by puffs of flame which, issuing from the lungs, expand in the air by taking on I know not what winged substances which our ears inhale, and which exalt us to the skies in an amorous ecstasy, one must be a god!"

"She is like that beautiful Indian plant that springs from the earth, collects invisible sustenance in the air, and sends forth from its rounded calyx, in white spirals, clouds

of perfume which cause dreams to bloom in our brains," replied Capraja.

La Tinti, being recalled, appeared alone; she was hailed by loud acclamations and innumerable kisses were thrown to her; they tossed roses to her, and a wreath for which women gave flowers from their head-dresses, almost all sent to Venice by Parisian milliners. The cavatina was demanded again.

"How impatiently Capraja, the lover of the roulade, must have awaited that piece, which derives all its value from the execution!" observed the duchess. "Here Rossini has put a curb in his mouth, so to speak, at the bidding of the singer. The roulade and the singer's intelligence are all there is to it. With an ordinary voice or ordinary execution it would amount to nothing. The windpipe has to exhibit the brilliancy of that passage. The singer ought to express the most intense grief — the grief of a woman who sees her lover dying before her eyes! La Tinti — hear her! — makes the whole hall ring with the most piercing notes, and, in order to give full play to pure art, Rossini wrote here plain, outspoken music; with a final effort, he conceived the idea of those heartrending musical exclamations: *Tormenti! affanni! smanie!* What shrieks! what agony in those roulades! See, La Tinti has carried the audience off their feet by her sublime performance."

The Frenchman, thunderstruck by the amorous frenzy of a whole theatre for the source of its enjoyment, caught a glimpse of the real Italy; but neither the duchess nor Vendramin nor Emilio paid the slightest attention to the ovation given La Tinti, when she began the cavatina again. The duchess was afraid that she was looking upon Emilio for the last time. As for the prince, in presence

of the duchess, that majestic divinity who bore him up into the sky, he knew not where he was, he did not hear the voluptuous voice of the woman who had initiated him in the lusts of the flesh, for heartrending melancholy caused his ears to hear a concert of plaintive voices accompanied by a sound like that of a heavy shower.

Vendramin, dressed as a procurator, was at this moment witnessing the ceremony of the Bucentaur. The Frenchman, who had finally concluded that there was some strange and painful mystery between the prince and the duchess, heaped the most ingenious conjectures upon one another, in attempting to fathom it.

The scene had changed. In a beautiful stage-setting representing the desert and the Red Sea, the Hebrews and Egyptians performed their evolutions without interrupting the meditations of the four occupants of the box. But when the first chords on the harps announced the prayer of the delivered Hebrews, the prince and Vendramin rose and leaned each against one of the partitions of the box, while the duchess rested her elbow on the velvet rail and supported her head with her left hand.

The Frenchman, informed by these changes of position of the importance attached by the audience to that justly celebrated passage, listened to it with religious attention. The whole hall demanded a repetition of the prayer by applauding it beyond all measure.

"I seem to have been assisting in the liberation of Italy," murmured a Milanese.

"That music raises the bowed heads and gives hope to the most benumbed hearts!" cried a Romagnese.

"At this point," said the duchess to the Frenchman, whose emotion was evident, "science has vanished; inspiration alone dictated that chef-d'œuvre, it comes from

the heart like a cry of love. The accompaniment consists of arpeggios by the harps, and the orchestra does n't take part until the last repetition of the celestial *motif*. Rossini will never rise to a greater height than in that prayer; he will do quite as well perhaps, but never better; the sublime always resembles itself, but that passage is one of the things that will always be wholly sublime. We can find an analogous conception nowhere except in the psalms of the divinely gifted Marcello, a noble Venetian who is to music what Giotto is to painting. The majesty of the *motif*, which, as it is developed, brings us an inexhaustible store of melody, is equal to the amplest inventions of religious geniuses. What simplicity in the method! Moses attacks the theme in G minor, and ends with a cadenza in B flat, which enables the chorus to take it up, pianissimo at first, in B flat, and to return it with a cadenza in G minor. This dignified manipulation of the voices, thrice repeated, ends in the last strophe with a *stretto* in G major, the effect of which is bewildering to the mind. It is as if the song of this people delivered out of bondage, as it ascends heavenward, meets other songs descending from the celestial realms. The stars respond joyously to the intoxication of the emancipated earth. The periodic recurrence of these *motifs*, the stateliness of the slow steps which pave the way for the bursting forth of the prayer, and its return upon itself, develop heavenly images in the mind. Can you not fancy that you see the heavens opening, the angels with their golden citherns, the prostrate seraphim waving their perfume-laden censers, and the archangels leaning on their flaming swords which have but now overthrown the impious? The secret of this harmony, which reanimates the brain, is, I believe, identical with that of some very rare works of man; it takes us for

a moment into the infinite, we are conscious of it, we see it vaguely in these immeasurable melodies which resemble those that are sung about the throne of God. Rossini's genius takes us to a prodigious height. Thence we discern a promised land into which our eyes, bathed in celestial rays, plunge, but can find no horizon. The last outcry of Elcia, now almost cured, attaches an earthly love to that hymn of gratitude. The *cantilena* is a stroke of genius.

"Sing!" added the duchess, as she heard the last measure, which was executed as it was listened to, with sombre enthusiasm; "sing — you are free!"

The last words were uttered in a tone that startled the physician; and to divert the duchess from her bitter reflections, he engaged her, during the excitement caused by the repeated recalls of La Tinti, in one of the disputes in which the French excel.

"Signora," he said, "while interpreting for me this master-work, — which I shall come again to see to-morrow with a perfect comprehension, thanks to you, both of the methods employed and of the effects obtained, — you have often mentioned the 'color,' of the music, and what it painted; but, in my capacity of analyst and materialist, I will confess that I am always disgusted by the attempt of some enthusiasts to convince us that music paints with sounds. Is it not as if Raphael's admirers should claim that he sings with colors?"

"In musical language," replied the duchess, "to paint is to awaken by sounds certain memories in our hearts, or certain images in our minds, and these memories, these images, have their color — they are melancholy or cheerful. You are picking a quarrel with us about words, that's all. According to Capraja, each instrument has its mission and appeals to certain ideas, just as each color corresponds to



certain feelings. When looking at gold arabesques on a blue background, do you have the same thoughts that are inspired by red arabesques on a green or black ground? In both sorts there are no figures, no sentiments expressed; it is all pure art, and yet no mind will remain unmoved upon looking at either. Has not the hautboy, like almost all the wind instruments, the power to conjure up rustic images in every mind? Is there not a something warlike about the brasses? do they not arouse in us lively and somewhat ebullient sensations? And the strings, whose material is derived from organic bodies, — do they not attack the most sensitive fibres of our organization — do they not make their way to the lowest depths of the heart? When I spoke of the dark colors, of the coldness of the notes employed in the introduction to *Moses*, did I not speak as accurately as your critics do when they prate about the color of such and such a writer? Do you not recognize the nervous style, the colorless style, the animated style, the highly colored style? Art paints with words, with notes, with colors, with outlines, with forms; although its methods are various, the results are the same. An Italian architect will produce in us the same sensation as the introduction to *Moses*, by taking us through dark, damp paths, bordered by tall densely-leaved trees, and then bringing us suddenly in sight of a valley filled with streams, flowers, and factories, and bathed in sunlight. In their grandiose efforts the arts are simply the expression of the great panoramas of nature. I am not learned enough to go into the philosophy of music; go and question Capraja, and you will be surprised by what he will tell you. According to him, each instrument, relying for its power of expression upon the duration, the breath, or the hand of man, is superior, as language, to the color that is fixed, and

to the word whose expression is limited. Musical language is infinite, it contains everything and can express everything. Do you know wherein lies the superiority of the work you have just heard? I will tell you in a few words. There are two sorts of music: one, paltry, contemptible, second-rate, always the same, which is based upon a hundred or more *motifs* that every musician appropriates, and which constitutes a sort of prattle, more or less agreeable, upon which many composers live; we listen to their songs, their alleged melodies, with more or less enjoyment, but absolutely nothing of them remains in the memory; a hundred years pass, they are forgotten. From ancient times down to our own days, nations have preserved as priceless treasures certain songs which sum up their manners and customs, I might almost say their history. Listen to one of those national songs (and the Gregorian chant is the heir of the earlier peoples in this respect), and you fall into profound meditation; despite the simplicity of those fragmentary musical rudiments, there pass through your mind vast, unheard-of ideas. Well, there are in each century one or two men of genius, no more, — the Homers of music, — to whom God gives the power to anticipate the future, and who compose these melodies full of accomplished facts, pregnant with poems of immense scope. Reflect upon this idea; it will bear fruit when repeated by you: it is melody, not harmony, which has the power to endure through the ages. The music of this oratorio contains a world of these great and sacred things. A work which begins with such an introduction and ends with such a prayer, is immortal — immortal like the *O filii et filiae* of Easter, like the *Dies irae* of Death, like all the music which in all countries survives vanished splendors, joys, prosperity."

The tears that the duchess wiped away as she left her box told plainly enough that she was thinking of the Venice that was no more; and Vendramin kissed her hand.

The entertainment ended with a concert of maledictions of a most original sort, with a storm of hisses for Genovese, and with an outburst of frenzy in favor of La Tinti. Not for a long time had the Venetians seen a theatre more excited; in short, their life was heated to a glow by the antagonism which has never been lacking in Italy, where the smallest town has always lived upon the opposing interests of two factions: Ghibelins and Guelphs everywhere, Capulets and Montagues in Verona, Geremei and Lomelli in Bologna, Fieschi and Dorias in Genoa, patricians and plebs, the senate and the tribunes of the Roman people, Pazzi and Medici in Florence, Sforza and Visconti in Milan, Orsini and Colonnas in Rome; everywhere, in fact, and in all places, the same tendency. In the streets there were already Genovesists and Tintists.

## VI.

THE duchess, made more than sad by Osiris's love-affairs, was escorted home by the prince; she feared some similar catastrophe for herself, and could only strain Emilio to her heart, as if to keep him with her.

"Remember your promise," Vendramin said to him; "I will wait for you on the square."

He took the Frenchman's arm and proposed that they should walk on the square of St. Mark's until the prince returned.

"I shall be overjoyed if he does n't come," he said.

That remark was the starting-point of a conversation between the Frenchman and Vendramin, the latter of whom was glad of an opportunity to consult a physician, and told him of Emilio's extraordinary plight. The Frenchman did what Frenchmen do on every occasion — he began to laugh. Vendramin, in whose eyes the matter was tremendously serious, lost his temper; but he quieted down when the pupil of Magendie, Cuvier, Dupuytren, and Broussais told him that he believed that he could cure the prince of his excess of good fortune, and could dissipate the celestial poesy with which he surrounded the duchess as with a cloud.

"Lucky unhappiness!" he said. "The ancients, who were not such fools as their glass sky and their ideas of physics would lead us to suppose, attempted to describe in their fable of Ixion that power that annihilates the body and makes the mind ruler over all things."

They saw Genovese coming toward them, accompanied by the erratic Capraja. The melomaniac was keenly interested to learn the real cause of the fiasco. The tenor, being questioned upon the subject, chattered like a man who works himself into a frenzy by force of the ideas suggested by a violent love.

"Yes, signore, I love her, I adore her with a violence of which I did not believe myself to be capable since I got tired of women. Women are too harmful to art to allow one to drive love and work in double harness. Clara thinks I am jealous of her triumphs, and that I intended to block her success in Venice; but I applauded her in the wings, and shouted *Diva!* louder than the whole audience."

"But," said Cataneo, joining the group at that moment, "that does n't explain how you were transformed from a divine singer into the most execrable performer that ever emitted the air from his windpipe, without a trace of that entrancing sweetness that delights us!"

"I," said the virtuoso, "I, become a poor singer, — I, who am the equal of the greatest masters!"

By this time the French physician, Vendramin, Capraja, Cataneo, and Genovese had entered the *piazzetta*. It was midnight. The glistening bay marked by the churches of St. George and St. Paul at the end of the Giudecca and by the beginning of the Grand Canal between the *dogana* and the church dedicated to Santa Maria della Salute, — that magnificent bay was perfectly calm. The moon shone upon the vessels that lay off the Schiavones. The waters of Venice, which are never agitated like the open sea, seemed alive, the myriads of facets sparkled so merrily.

Never did singer stand upon a more magnificent stage. Genovese called sky and sea to witness by a vigorous gesture; then, without other accompaniment than the plashing

of the waves, he sang the aria, *Ombra adorata*, Cresceni's chef-d'œuvre. That melody, rising between the famous statues of St. Theodore and St. George in the heart of sleeping Venice, illuminated by the moon; the words, so thoroughly in harmony with the scene, and Genovese's melancholy expression, all combined to conquer Italians and Frenchman alike. At the first notes Vendramin's face was wet with great tears. Capraja stood as motionless as one of the statues of the ducal palace. Cataneo seemed to be struggling with his emotion. The Frenchman, taken by surprise, reflected like a scientist confronted with a phenomenon that shatters one of the fundamental axioms. Those four widely different minds, whose hopes were so faint, who believed in nothing either for themselves or after themselves, who admitted for their own satisfaction that they were transitory, capricious shapes, like a plant or a beetle, — caught a glimpse of heaven. Never did music better deserve the epithet "divine." The comforting notes that issued from that throat encompassed their spirits with soft and caressing vapors. Those semi-visible vapors, like the marble house-tops about the auditors, gleaming like silver in the moonbeams, seemed to serve as seats for angels whose wings expressed adoration and love by their gentle motion. That simple, artless melody made its way into the inmost senses and carried the light thither. How sanctified the passion! But what a ghastly awakening the tenor had in store for those noble sensations.

"Am I a wretched singer?" demanded Genovese when he had finished the aria.

All regretted that the voice was not a heavenly thing. So that angelic music was attributable solely to wounded self-esteem! The singer felt nothing, he thought no more of the pious sentiments, of the divine images that he

evoked in their hearts, than the violin knows what Paganini makes it say. They had all striven to see Venice raising her shroud and singing with her own voice, and lo! it was simply a matter of a tenor's fiasco.

"Can you guess the meaning of such a phenomenon?" the physician asked Capraja, seeking to induce the man to talk whom the duchess had mentioned as a profound thinker.

"What do you mean?" said Capraja.

"That Genovese, who is excellent when *La Tinti* is not present, turns into a braying ass with her."

"He obeys a secret law which will be mathematically demonstrated some day perhaps by one of your chemists, and which the next century will find a formula full of X's and A's and B's, interspersed with little algebraic fancies, with symbols and lines that give one the colic, because the finest inventions of mathematics do not add much to the sum total of our enjoyment. When an artist has the misfortune to be full of the passion he seeks to express, he cannot depict it at all, for it is the thing itself, instead of its image. Art comes from the brain, not from the heart. When your subject dominates you, you are its slave, not its master. You are like a king besieged by his people. To feel too keenly when the time comes to execute is, as it were, a revolt of the senses against the faculties."

"Should we not convince ourselves of this by another test?" asked the physician.

"Cataneo, you can bring your tenor and the prima donna together again," said Capraja to his friend.

"Signori," the duke rejoined, "come and take supper with me. We must reconcile Clarina and the tenor; otherwise the whole season will be ruined."

The invitation was accepted.

"Gondoliers!" shouted Cataneo.

"One moment," said Vendramin to the duke; "Memmi is waiting for me at the Florian, and I don't want to leave him alone; let us make him drunk to-night, or he'll kill himself to-morrow."

"*Corpo santo!*" cried the duke; "I want to preserve that fine fellow for the happiness and future welfare of my family. I'll go and invite him."

They all returned to the café Florian, where the crowd was excited by stormy discussions which ceased on the appearance of the tenor. In a corner, by one of the windows looking on the gallery, with staring eyes and motionless limbs, stood the prince, a ghastly image of despair.

"The madman," said the physician to Vendramin, in French, "does n't know what he wants. There is in this world a man who can separate a Massimilla Doni from all creation, possessing her in heaven, amid the ideal splendors which no power can realize here on earth. He can see his mistress always sublime and chaste, can hear always within himself what we were just listening to on the water's edge, can live always in the fire of two eyes which create for him the warm golden atmosphere with which Titian has surrounded the head of the Virgin in his Assumption, and which Raphael first invented, after some revelation, for his Christ Transfigured; and that man aspires only to besmear that poetic incarnation! Through my treatment he will combine his fleshly love and his divine love in that one woman! In short, he will do as we all do, he will have a mistress. He possessed a divinity, and the wretch would have made a mere female of her! I tell you, signore, he is giving up heaven, and I won't answer for his not dying of despair later. O female



shapes, delicately outlined by a pure and luminous oval, who recall the creations wherein art has contended victoriously with nature! divine feet that cannot walk, slender figures that an earthly breeze would shatter, graceful bodies that will never conceive, virgins glimpsed by us as we come forth from childhood, admired in secret, adored without hope, enveloped in the rags of an unwearying desire, you, whom we no longer see, but whose smile governs our whole existence, — what Epicurean swine ever sought you, to hurl you into the slime of earth! Ah! signore, the sun shines upon the earth and warms it only because it is thirty-three millions of leagues away; go near it, and science tells you that you will find it neither hot nor luminous; for science is of some use,” he added, glancing at Capraja.

“Not bad for a French doctor,” said Capraja, tapping him lightly on the shoulder. “You have explained what Europe understands least in Dante — his *Bice*! Yes, Beatrice, that imaginary figure, the queen of the poet’s conceptions, elect among all, consecrated by tears, deified by the memory, constantly made young again by unsatisfied desires!”

“Come and take supper with me, my prince,” said the duke in Emilio’s ear. “When one robs a poor Neapolitan of wife and mistress alike, one should deny him nothing.”

This Neapolitan buffoonery, delivered with aristocratic courtesy, extorted a smile from Emilio, who allowed the other to take his arm and lead him away. The duke had begun operation by despatching one of the waiters from the café to his house. As the Memmi palace was on the Grand Canal, near Santa Maria della Salute, they must either make a *détour* on foot by the Rialto, or go in gondolas; as the guests did not wish to separate, they

preferred to walk across Venice. The duke's infirmities forced him to go in his gondola.

Whoever had chanced to pass the Memmi palace about two in the morning would have seen it pouring light through all its windows on the waters of the Grand Canal, and would have heard the lovely overture to *Semiramide*, performed at the foot of the steps by the orchestra from La Fenice, who were serenading La Tinti. The guests were at table in the gallery on the second floor. From the balcony La Tinti acknowledged the serenade by singing Almariva's *Buona sera*, while the duke's steward distributed his master's largess among the poor artists and invited them to dinner on the morrow: a polite attention obligatory upon great nobles who protect songstresses and ladies who protect singers. In such cases one must inevitably marry the whole theatre. Cataneo did things handsomely; he was the manager's *croupier*, and that season cost him two thousand crowns. He had sent for the plate belonging to the palace, a French cook, and wines of all countries; so you may believe that the supper was served in regal fashion.

Seated beside La Tinti, the prince was keenly conscious, throughout the repast, of what poets in all tongues call the shafts of love. The image of the sublime Massimilla grew dim, even as the idea of God is sometimes obscured by clouds of doubt in the minds of solitary scholars. La Tinti deemed herself the most fortunate woman on earth when she saw that Emilio loved her; sure of possessing him, she was aflame with an intense joy that was reflected on her face; her beauty was so resplendent that each guest, as he emptied his glass, could not refrain from inclining in her direction as a token of admiration.

"The duchess is n't equal to La Tinti," said the physi-

cian, forgetting his theory under the fire of the Sicilian's eyes.

The tenor ate and drank indolently; he seemed determined to identify himself with the prima donna's life, and he lost that gross, hearty sense of pleasure which characterizes Italian singers.

"Come, signorina," said the duke with a glance of entreaty at La Tinti, "and you, *caro primo uomo*," he added, to Genovese, "blend your voices in a perfect chord. Repeat the C of the *Qual portento*, when the light appears in the oratorio, to convince my old friend Capraja of the superiority of the chord to the roulade!"

"I mean to triumph over the prince whom she loves; for any one can see that she adores him!" said Genovese to himself.

Imagine the amazement of those men who had just listened to Genovese on the canal, when they heard him bray and coo and snarl and gurgle and roar and bellow and bark and shriek and even produce notes that resembled the death-rattle; in short, play an utterly incomprehensible comedy while presenting to the wondering eyes of his auditors a face lighted by a sublime look of exaltation, like those of the martyrs painted by Zurbaran, Murillo, Titian, and Raphael. The laughter that wreathed every lip changed to an almost tragic seriousness when they realized that Genovese was acting in perfect good faith. La Tinti seemed to understand that her comrade loved her and had told the truth on the stage, that abode of lies.

"*Poverino!*" she murmured, patting the prince's hand under the table.

"Per Dio Santo!" cried Capraja, "will you kindly tell me what score you are reading at this moment, you murderer of Rossini? In heaven's name, tell us what's going

on inside of you, what devil is struggling in your windpipe?"

"What devil!" rejoined Genovese; "say rather the God of music. My eyes, like St. Cecilia's, see angels who point one by one to notes of the score, written in characters of fire, and I try to contend with them. Per Dio! don't you understand me? The sentiment that animates me has passed through my whole being, into my heart and into my lungs. My soul and my windpipe form but a single breath. Have you never, in a dream, listened to sublime music, conceived by unknown composers who employed the pure sound which nature has placed in everything and which we produce more or less faithfully by the instruments with which we compose highly colored masses, but which, in these marvellous concerts, appears freed from the imperfections that the performers import into it, — for they cannot be all sentiment, all soul? — well, those marvels of sound I produce for you, and you curse me! You are as insane as the pit at La Fenice, which hissed me. I despised that vulgar mob for being unable to ascend with me to the summit from which one dominates art, and it is left for remarkable men, a Frenchman — Why, he has gone!"

"Half an hour ago," said Vendramin.

"So much the worse! Perhaps he would have understood me, since you excellent Italians, who are in love with art, do not understand me."

"Ta, ta, ta!" said Capraja, tapping the tenor's head, with a smile; "gallop away on the divine Ariosto's hippogriff; run after your brilliant chimæras — a musical *theriaki*."

In truth, all the guests, convinced that Genovese was drunk, let him talk on, without listening to him. Capraja alone had understood the question propounded by the Frenchman.

While the wine of Cyprus loosened every tongue and each guest pranced about on his favorite hobby-horse, the physician was awaiting the duchess in a gondola, after sending up to her a note written by Vendramin. Massimilla appeared in her night-clothes, so terrified was she by the prince's leave-taking and so surprised by the hope suggested in the letter.

"Signora," said the physician, as he bade her be seated and ordered the gondoliers to start, "it is a question at this moment of saving Emilio Memmi's life, and you alone can do it."

"What must I do?" she asked.

"Ah! can you make up your mind to play an infamous part, despite the noblest face that can be found in all Italy? Will you descend from the blue heaven in which you dwell, to the bed of a courtesan? In a word, will you, sublime angel, pure and spotless beauty that you are, consent to divine the character of La Tinti's love, in her own house, and in such wise as to deceive the ardent Emilio, whom drunkenness will make far from keen-sighted?"

"Is that all?" she said, smiling and revealing to the astonished Frenchman a hitherto unsuspected corner of the charming character of a loving Italian. "I will surpass La Tinti, if need be, to save my friend's life."

"And you will blend in a single love two loves separated in his heart by a mountain of poesy which will melt like the ice of a glacier under the rays of the sun."

"I shall be under everlasting obligations to you," said the duchess gravely.

When the Frenchman returned to the gallery, where the orgy had taken on the aspect of genuine Venetian folly, his face wore a joyful expression which escaped the prince, who was fascinated by La Tinti, looking forward to a repe-

tition of the bliss which he had already enjoyed with her. Like a true Sicilian, La Tinti was swimming in the excitement of an amorous caprice on the point of being gratified.

The Frenchman whispered a few words in Vendramin's ear, and La Tinti was alarmed.

"What are you plotting?" she asked the prince's friend.

"Are you a kind-hearted girl?" the physician whispered to her, with the harshness of an operating surgeon.

The question entered the poor creature's understanding as a dagger-stroke enters a heart.

"It's a question of saving Emilio's life," Vendramin added.

"Come," said the physician to La Tinti.

The unhappy singer rose and walked to the end of the table, between Vendramin and the physician, where she appeared like a criminal between her confessor and the executioner. She struggled a long while, but she succumbed at last from love for Emilio. The physician's last words were: —

"And you will cure Genovese!"

La Tinti said a word to the tenor as she walked around the table. She returned to the prince, clasped him about the neck, kissed his hair with a desperate expression which impressed Vendramin and the Frenchman, who alone had possession of their senses; then she rushed into her bedroom.

Emilio, seeing Genovese leave the table and Cataneo engaged in an endless musical discussion with Capraja, glided toward the door of La Tinti's room, raised the portière, and disappeared like an eel in the mud.

"Well, Cataneo," said Capraja, "you have exhausted physical enjoyment, and here you are hanging to life by a thread, like a pasteboard harlequin, spattered with scars

and moving only when some one pulls the string of a chord."

"And you, Capraja, who have exhausted the resources of the mind — are not you in the same condition? are n't you living astride a roulade?"

"I possess the whole world!" exclaimed Capraja, putting out his hand with a kingly gesture.

"And I have devoured it!" retorted the duke.

They found that Vendramin and the Frenchman had gone and that they were alone.

The next day, after the happiest of happy nights, the prince's sleep was disturbed by a dream. He felt upon his breast pearls shed by an angel. He awoke, he was swimming in the tears of Massimilla Doni, in whose arms he lay, and who was gazing at him as he slept.

At La Fenice that evening, Genovese — although his comrade La Tinti had not let him rise until two in the afternoon, which, they say, injures a tenor's voice — Genovese sang his rôle in *Semiramide* divinely; he was recalled with La Tinti, fresh wreaths were bestowed, the pit was drunk with delight, and the tenor was no longer solicitous to fascinate the prima donna by the charms of an angelic method.

Vendramin was the only one whom the physician could not cure. The love of a country that no longer exists is a passion without a remedy. The young Venetian, by dint of living in his thirteenth-century republic, of lying with that great courtesan created by opium, and of finding himself again at last in real life, brought thither by the after-effects of the drug, died, lamented and beloved by his friends.

How shall we tell the dénouement of this episode, for it

is shockingly bourgeois! A word will suffice for the worshippers of *the ideal*: Massimilla was enceinte!

The peris, the water-nymphs, the fairies, the sylphs of olden time, the muses of Greece, the marble Virgins of the Certosa of Pavia, Michelangelo's Day and Night, the little Angels whom Bellini first placed at the foot of church paintings, and whom Raphael painted so divinely at the foot of the Madonna *au donataire*, and of the Madonna freezing at Dresden, Orcagna's beautiful maidens in the church of San-Michele in Florence, the celestial choir of the tomb of St. Sebaldus at Nuremberg, some of the Virgins in the Duomo at Milan, the statues of innumerable Gothic cathedrals, the whole race of figures who shatter their shapes in order to come to you, O ye comprehensive artists — all those angelic incorporeal maidens assembled about the bed of Massimilla Doni and wept there.

PARIS, May 25, 1839.



**HONORINE.**

TO M. ACHILLE DEVÉRIA.  
IN TOKEN OF THE AUTHOR'S AFFECTION.

## HONORINE.



### I.

IF the French are as disinclined to travelling as the English are inclined thereto, it may be that the French and the English are both right. One can find anywhere on earth something that is an improvement on England, while it is exceedingly difficult to find the charms of France elsewhere than in France. Other countries offer us beautiful landscapes and often tempt us with comforts superior to those of France, which progresses very slowly in that respect. They sometimes display a magnificence, a grandeur, a luxury that are absolutely bewildering; they lack neither grace nor noble manners; but the life of the brain, the activity of ideas, the gift of conversation, the Attic flavor, so familiar in Paris; the instant comprehension of what one thinks but does not say; the genius for implying more than is said, which is half of the French language, — all these are found nowhere else. And so the Frenchman, whose satire is so imperfectly understood, soon withers in other lands like an uprooted tree. Emigration is an absurdity so far as the French are concerned. Many Frenchmen who have left their native land confess that they have rejoiced to see the customs officers once more, which may well seem the most hyperbolical expression of patriotism.

It is the purpose of this little preamble to remind those

Frenchmen who have travelled of the exceeding great joy they have known when, on occasion, they have found their fatherland *in petto*, an oasis in a diplomatist's salon; a joy which those persons will find it hard to understand who have never left the asphalt pavements of Boulevard des Italiens, and in whose eyes even the quays on the left bank are not Paris. To find Paris! Do you know what that means, O Parisians? It means, not to find the cuisine of the Rocher de Cancale, as Borel administers it for the *gourmets* who are able to appreciate it (for that is obtainable only on rue Montorgueil), but a cuisine which reminds you of it! It means to find the wines of France, which are almost mythological outside of France, and as rare as the woman with whom this tale has to do! It means to find, not the fashionable jests of the day, for they lose their point between Paris and the frontier, but the clever, critical, comprehensive *milieu* in which all Frenchmen live, from the poet to the mechanic, from the duchess to the street arab!

In 1836, during the residence of the Sardinian court at Genoa, two Parisians, more or less celebrated, were able to fancy themselves once more in Paris when they met in a palace rented by the consul-general of France, on the hill — the last dip of the Apennines between the gate of St. Thomas and the famous lantern which is in evidence in all views of Genoa in the old "Keepsakes." The palace in question is one of the superb villas upon which the Genoese nobles spent millions in the days when that aristocratic republic was prosperous and powerful. If the semi-darkness is beautiful anywhere, it surely is at Genoa, when it has rained, as it does rain there, in torrents, during the whole morning; when the purity of the sea disputes the palm with the purity of the sky; when silence

reigns on the quay and amid the bosky groves of the villa in question, in the marble statues with open mouths from which the water flows mysteriously; when the stars shine, when the waves of the Mediterranean succeed one another like the avowals of a woman from whom you extort them word by word.

Let us confess that the moment when the fragrant air fills one's lungs and one's musings with perfume, when sensual pleasure, visible and mobile like the atmosphere, seizes you as you sit in your arm-chair, spoon in hand, pecking at ices or sherbets, a city at your feet and lovely women before you — that such hours *à la* Boccaccio are to be found only in Italy, on the Mediterranean.

Imagine seated at the table the Marquis di Negro, that hospitable brother of all talented travellers, and the Marquis Damaso Pareto (two Frenchmen disguised as Genoese), the consul-general, surrounded by a wife beautiful as a Madonna and two children who are silent because sleep has captured them, the French ambassador and his wife, the first secretary of the embassy, who deems himself slighted and capable of mischief, and, lastly, two Parisians who have come to take leave of the consul's wife at a handsome dinner, and you will have before you the picture presented by the terrace of the villa one evening toward mid-May — a picture dominated by a personage, a celebrated woman upon whom all eyes were fixed from time to time, and who was the heroine of that impromptu festivity.

One of the two Frenchmen was the famous landscapist, Léon de Lora, the other a famous critic, Claude Vignon. Both of them accompanied the woman in question, one of the present-day celebrities of the fair sex, Mademoiselle des Touches, well-known in the literary world under the

name of Camille Maupin. Mademoiselle des Touches had gone to Florence on business. Acting upon one of the delightful kindly impulses which are so frequent with her, she had taken Léon de Lora with her, to exhibit Italy to him, and had gone as far as Rome to show him the Campagna. They had come by the Simplon and were returning to Marseilles by the Corniche road. Again on the landscapist's account, she had stopped at Genoa.

Naturally the consul-general, before the arrival of the court, had been eager to do the honors of Genoa to a person whose fortune, name, and position in society are as conspicuous as her talent.

Camille Maupin, who knew Genoa to its smallest chapel, left her artist in the care of the diplomatist and the two Genoese marquises, and was sparing of her moments. Although the ambassador was a very distinguished writer, the famous woman declined to be beguiled by his courteous advances, dreading what the English call "an exhibition;" but she withdrew the claws of her refusal when it was a question of a parting day at the consul's villa. Léon de Lora told her that her presence at the villa was the only acknowledgment he could make of the courtesy of the ambassador and his wife, the Genoese marquises, and the consul and his wife. So Mademoiselle des Touches sacrificed one of those days of entire freedom which are not always to be had in Paris by those upon whom the world has its eyes.

The circumstances of the gathering being thus explained, one can readily conceive that etiquette was banished from it, as well as many women, including some of most exalted rank, who were curious to see whether the masculine quality of Camille Maupin's talent detracted from the

charms of a beautiful woman — whether, in a word, the breeches reached below the skirt.

From dinner until nine o'clock, at which hour the supper was served, although the conversation had been merry and grave in turn, constantly enlivened by the shafts of Léon de Lora, who is esteemed the most entertaining man in the Paris of to-day, there had been little talk on literary matters, by virtue of a good taste which is not surprising in view of the selection of the guests; but sooner or later the restless fluttering of that French coterie was certain to arrive at that essentially national subject, though it were only to breathe lightly upon it. But before coming to that turn in the conversation which led the consul-general to take the floor, it will be well to say a word of him and his family.

That diplomat, a man of about thirty-four, who had been six years married, was the living portrait of Lord Byron. The celebrity of the latter's physiognomy makes it unnecessary for us to describe the consul's. We may remark, however, that there was no affectation in his meditative air. Lord Byron was a poet, and the consul was poetic; women were quick to recognize this difference, which explains, although it does not justify, some of their attachments. This physical beauty, heightened by a delightful disposition and by his habit of solitude and hard work, had captivated a Genoese heiress. A Genoese heiress! That phrase may well provoke a smile at Genoa, where, as a result of the customary exheredation of daughters, rich women are rare. But Onorina Pedrotti, the only child of a banker with no heirs male, was an exception.

Although greatly flattered by having kindled a passion, the consul did not seem disposed to marry. But after two years' residence at Genoa, after certain advances on the

part of the ambassador during the sojourn of the court there, the marriage was arranged. The young man withdrew his original refusal, less because of Onorina Pedrotti's touching affection for him, than because of an occurrence generally unknown — one of those crises in a man's private life which are so promptly buried beneath the current of every-day interests that, later, even the most natural acts seem incomprehensible. This entanglement of causes very often affects, too, the most momentous events in history. Such at least was the opinion of the city of Genoa, where some women considered that the French consul's excessive reserve and melancholy could be interpreted only by the word "passion." Let us remark in passing that women never complain of being the victims of a preference; they readily sacrifice themselves in the common cause.

Onorina Pedrotti, who would perhaps have detested the consul if she had been absolutely disdained, loved her *sposo* none the less, nay, perhaps more, knowing him to be in love. Women acknowledge the right of precedence in affairs of the heart. Everything is safe, when it's a question of sex. A man is never a diplomat with impunity: the *sposo* was as discreet as the grave, so discreet that the merchants of Genoa chose to detect some premeditation in the attitude of the young consul, whom the heiress would have escaped, perhaps, if he had not played the rôle of the *Malade Imaginaire* in love. If that was the truth, the women found it too degrading to believe it.

Pedrotti's daughter made of her love a consolation, she cradled her unknown sorrows in a bed of Italian caresses and endearments. Moreover, Il Signor Pedrotti had no reason to complain of the choice to which he was constrained by his beloved daughter. Powerful patrons in Paris watched over the young diplomatist's fortune. In



accordance with the ambassador's promise to the father-in-law, the consul-general was made a baron and commander of the Legion of Honor. Lastly, Il Signor Pedrotti was made a count by the King of Sardinia.

The dowry was a million. As for the fortune of the *Casa* Pedrotti, which was reckoned at two millions, amassed in the grain trade, it fell to the young husband and wife six months after the marriage, for the first and last of the Counts Pedrotti died in January, 1831.

Onorina Pedrotti was one of those beautiful Genoese women who are the most superb creatures in Italy when they are beautiful. For the tomb of Julian, Michael Angelo obtained his models in Genoa. Hence the amplitude, the curious arrangement of the bosom in the figures of Day and Night, which so many critics consider exaggerated, but which is peculiar to the women of Liguria. At Genoa beauty no longer exists except under the *mezzaro*, as at Venice it is seen only under the *fazzioli*. This same phenomenon is observable in all nations that have gone to ruin. The noble type is found now only among the common people, just as, after a conflagration, the medals are buried in the ashes.

But Onorina, exceptional as we have already said, in the matter of fortune, was exceptional also as a type of patrician beauty. Recall the figure of Night that Michael Angelo painted under his *Penseroso*; dress it in modern garb, wind the beautiful long hair about the magnificent head, somewhat dark in tone, introduce a spark of fire into those dreamy eyes, wrap the ample bust in a scarf, observe the long white gown embroidered with flowers, imagine that the standing figure is seated and has folded her arms like Mademoiselle Georges, and you will have before your

eyes the consul's wife, with a child of six, beautiful as a mother's desire, and with a little girl of four on her knees, as lovely as the type of child laboriously sought by David the sculptor for the decoration of a tomb.

That charming family was the object of Camille Maupin's secret scrutiny. It seemed to her that the consul's manner was too distraught for a perfectly happy man. Although throughout the day the husband and wife had presented the admirable spectacle of the most cloudless happiness, Camille wondered why one of the most distinguished men whom she had ever known, a man whom she had met in Parisian salons, should remain consul-general at Genoa, when he possessed a fortune of more than a hundred thousand francs a year! But she had discovered too, by many of those trifles which women collect with the intelligence of the wise Arab in "Zadig," the most loyal affection on the husband's part. Surely those two charming creatures would love each other, without a shadow of misunderstanding, to the end of their days.

Camille therefore said to herself, "What is the matter?" or "There is nothing!" according to the deceptive indications of the consul-general's demeanor, who had at command the absolute tranquillity of Englishmen, savages, Orientals, and consummate diplomatists.

In discussing literature, they fell upon the exhaustless stock in trade of the republic of letters: the sins of woman. And they soon found themselves confronted by two opinions on the question whether the man or the woman is to blame in the woman's fall. The three women present, the ambassadress, the consul's wife, and Mademoiselle des Touches, all of whom were naturally supposed to be beyond reproach, were without mercy for their sex. The

men tried to prove to those three flowers of womankind that a woman might retain some virtue after her fall.

"How long are we going to play at hide-and-seek thus?" inquired Léon de Lora.

"*Cara vita* [my dear life], go and put your children to bed, and send me by Gina the small black portfolio that's on my Boule desk," said the consul to his wife.

She rose without speaking, which proves that she loved her husband dearly, for she knew enough French already to understand that he was sending her out of the way.

"I am going to tell you a story in which I play a part, and after which we can argue the question; for it seems childish to me to ply the scalpel on an imaginary dead man. If you want to dissect, first of all take a corpse."

All the guests composed themselves to listen, with the better grace because they had all talked enough. The conversation was on the point of languishing, and such a moment offers an opportunity that story-tellers ought always to grasp. This is what the consul-general told.

## II.

AT twenty-two, when I had received my degree in law, my old uncle, Abbé Loraux, then in his seventy-second year, felt that it was incumbent on him to furnish me with a patron and to start me on some career or other. That excellent man, although he was not a saint, looked upon each additional year as a new gift from God. I need not tell you how easy it was for the confessor to a royal highness to find a place for a young man who had been educated by him, his sister's only child. And so one day, toward the end of the year 1824, the venerable old man, who had been five years curé of the Blancs-Manteaux, in Paris, came up to the room that I occupied in his vicarage, and said to me: —

“Dress yourself, my boy, for I am going to introduce you to the person whose service you are to enter as secretary. If I am not mistaken, this person will take my place in case God should call me to Him. I shall have said my Mass by nine o'clock, so you have three-quarters of an hour; be ready.”

“Oh, uncle,” I said, “must I say farewell to this room where I have been so happy for four years?”

“I have no fortune to leave you,” he replied.

“Will you not leave me the protection of your name, the memory of your good works, and — ”

“Let us talk not about that inheritance,” he said with a smile. “You don't know enough of the world yet to know

that it would find it hard to pay a legacy of that sort, whereas by taking you this morning to monsieur le comte" — you will allow me to designate my patron by a Christian name only, and to call him Comte Octave — "whereas by taking you this morning to Monsieur le Comte Octave's, I think that I am providing you with a patron whose goodwill, if you please that virtuous statesman, will surely be equal in value to the fortune I should have saved for you if my brother-in-law's bankruptcy and my sister's death had not come upon me like thunderbolts out of a clear sky."

"Are you monsieur le comte's confessor?"

"What! if I were, could I ask him to employ you? What sort of priest is he who is capable of taking advantage of secrets the knowledge of which comes to him in the tribunal of penance? No, you owe his patronage to his Highness the Keeper of the Seals. My dear Maurice, it will be like living in your father's house. Monsieur le comte gives you a salary of two thousand four hundred francs, apartments in his house, and an allowance of twelve hundred francs for your board; he will not admit you to his table, and prefers not to have your meals served to you separately, in order not to give you over to the care of inferiors. I did not accept the offer made me until I had made myself absolutely sure that Comte Octave's secretary will never be an upper servant. You will be overwhelmed with work, for the count is a great worker; but you will leave his service capable of filling the highest posts. I do not need to recommend discretion, the foremost virtue of men destined for public office."

Imagine my curiosity! Comte Octave at that time filled one of the most exalted offices in the magistracy; he had the confidence of Madame la Dauphine, who had just pro-

cured his appointment as a minister of state; he led a life almost like that of the Comte de Sérizy, — whom you all know, I think, — but somewhat more obscure, for he lived in the Marais, on rue Payenne, and almost never received. His private life eluded the scrutiny of the public by virtue of his hermit-like modesty and continuous toil.

Allow me to describe my situation in a few words. Having found in the solemn head-master of the Collège Saint-Louis a guardian to whom my uncle had delegated his powers, I had finished my lectures at eighteen. I had left the college as pure-minded as a seminarist filled with the faith, on leaving Saint Sulpice. On her death-bed my mother had obtained from my uncle a promise that I should not be a priest; but I was as piously inclined as if I were destined to take holy orders. On my coming down from the college roost (*dépucher*), to employ an ancient and picturesque term, Abbé Loraux took me to his vicarage and set me to studying law. During the four years of study required to pass through all the grades, I worked hard, especially outside the arid fields of jurisprudence. Nourished upon literature at the college, where I lived in the head-master's household, I had an intense thirst to quench. As soon as I had read some of the modern masterpieces, the works of all the preceding centuries were devoured. I became mad over the theatre and went every day, although my uncle gave me only a hundred francs a month. That parsimoniousness, to which the dear old man was constrained by his affection for the poor, resulted in confining the young man's appetites within reasonable limits. At the time I entered Comte Octave's service I was no innocent, but I looked upon my infrequent escapades as so many crimes.

My uncle was so truly angelic, I dreaded so to grieve

him, that I had never passed a night away from home during those four years. The excellent man always waited until I had come in before going to bed. That maternal solicitude was more potent in holding me in check than all the sermons and reproofs with which a young man's life is bespangled in puritan families. Unfamiliar with the different circles that make up Parisian society, I knew no women of rank or bourgeois save those whom I saw when I was out walking, or in the boxes at the theatre, and then only at a distance, from the pit where I always sat. If in those days any one had said to me, "You are likely to see Canalis, or Camille Maupin," I should have been on fire in my brain and my vitals. Famous people were in my eyes like gods who did not speak or walk or eat like other men.

How many tales like the "Thousand and One Nights" might be told of one man's youth! how many "Wonderful Lamps" must one have handled before realizing that the real wonderful lamp is either chance, or hard work, or genius! With some men such dreams dreamed by the newly awakened mind are of brief duration; mine is still going on! In those days I always fell asleep as Grand Duke of Tuscany — a millionaire — a princess's favored lover — or famous! So that, to enter the service of Comte Octave, to have a hundred louis a year of my own, was to enter upon a life of independence. I imagined some chance of making my way into society, of seeking there what my heart most earnestly desired — a patroness who would withdraw me from the dangerous path which young men of twenty-two necessarily follow in Paris, however virtuous and well brought up they may be.

I was beginning to be afraid of myself. Persistent study of international law, into which I had plunged, did not

always suffice to hold in check painful fancies. Yes, sometimes in imagination I devoted myself to the life of the stage; I thought that I might become a great actor; I dreamed of triumphs and love-affairs without end, knowing nothing of the disillusionments hidden behind the curtain, as everywhere else, for every stage has its wings. I sometimes left the house with my heart in a turmoil, led by a longing to beat up Paris, to attach myself to some beautiful woman whom I might chance to meet, follow her to her door, spy upon her actions, write to her, confide in her absolutely, and conquer her by the power of love.

My poor uncle, that heart consumed by charity, that child of seventy years, as intelligent as God, and as ingenuous as a man of genius, doubtless divined my inward tumult, for he never failed to say, "Ah! Maurice, you're a poor man too! Here are twenty francs, go and enjoy yourself — you're not a priest!" when he felt that the cord by which he held me was stretched almost to the breaking-point. If you could have seen the jack-o'-lanterns that sparkled in his gray eyes at such times, the smile that curled his winsome lips, drawing them down toward the corners of his mouth, — in a word, the adorable expression of that majestic face, whose original ugliness was modified by an apostolic spirit, you would understand the feeling that led me to make no other reply than to kiss the curé of the Blancs-Manteaux as if he were my mother.

"You will not have a master," said my uncle as we were going to rue Payenne, "but a friend, in Comte Octave. He is distrustful, however, or, to speak more accurately, he is prudent. His friendship can be gained only with time; for, despite his keenness of instinct



and his habit of estimating men, he was deceived by the man whose successor you are to be; he was very near being the victim of misplaced confidence. I need say no more as to the way you should conduct yourself in his service."

When my uncle knocked at the enormous main gate of a mansion as large as the hôtel Carnavelet, and built between courtyard and garden, the blow rang out as in a vacuum. While he sent his name to the count by an old gate-keeper in livery, I cast one of those glances that embrace everything on the courtyard, where the pavements were almost hidden by weeds, on time-blackened walls, which had little gardens on top, above the decorations of a charming architectural type, and on roofs as high as those of the Tuileries. The rails of the upper galleries were worm-eaten. Through a magnificent archway, I saw a second courtyard at the side, where the offices were, with doors rotting on their hinges. An ancient coachman was cleaning an ancient vehicle. From the man's indifferent air it was easy to imagine that the luxurious stables where scores of horses formerly stamped and neighed, now held two at most. The stately façade of the courtyard had a gloomy look to me, like that of a palace belonging to the state or the crown, and given over to some public use.

A bell rang while my uncle and I were on our way from the concierge's lodge (over the door were still written the words, "Speak to the concierge") to the doorway, from which a footman came toward us in a livery not unlike that worn by the Labranches of the Théâtre Français in the old repertory. A visit was such a rare occurrence, that he was hurriedly putting on his jacket as he opened a glass door with small panes, on either side of which the

smoke from two lanterns had formed star-shaped figures on the wall.

A peristyle of a splendor worthy of Versailles disclosed one of those staircases which are no longer built in France, and which fill as much space as a modern house. As we ascended a flight of stone stairs cold as gravestones, upon which eight persons could walk abreast, our footsteps rang out beneath echoing arches. We could imagine ourselves in a cathedral. The stair-rails attracted the eye by miracles of the smith's art, which reproduced the fantasies of some artist of the reign of Henri III.

Chilled by a cloak of ice which fell upon our shoulders, we passed through reception-rooms and salons, with uncarpeted inlaid floors, furnished with the magnificent antiques that descend from such palaces to the shops of second-hand dealers. At last we arrived at a large study in a square pavilion, of which all the windows looked upon an immense garden.

"Monsieur le curé des Blancs-Manteaux and his nephew, Monsieur de l'Hostal!" announced the Labranche to whom the stage footman had handed us over in the first reception-room.

Comte Octave, dressed in trousers with feet and a redingote of gray swanskin, rose from a huge desk, came forward to the fireplace, and motioned to me to take a seat, while he grasped my uncle's hands and shook them heartily.

"Although I am in the parish of Saint-Paul," he said, "it would be strange if I had not heard of the curé of the Blancs-Manteaux, and I am happy to make his acquaintance."

"Your Excellency is very kind," my uncle replied. "I bring you the only kinsman I have left on earth. If

I consider that I am making your Excellency a gift, I consider no less that I am giving my nephew a second father."

"That is a point as to which I shall be able to give you an answer, monsieur l'abbé, when your nephew and I have tested each other," said Comte Octave. "Your name?" he asked me.

"Maurice."

"He has a doctor's degree in law," said my uncle.

"Very good, very good," said the count, scrutinizing me from head to foot. "I hope, monsieur l'abbé, that, for your nephew's sake first of all, and for mine also, you will do me the honor to dine here every Monday. That will be our family dinner-party, our evening."

My uncle and the count began to discuss religion from the standpoint of politics, works of charity, and the putting down of crime, and I had an opportunity to examine at my leisure the man upon whom my destiny was to depend. The count was of medium height; it was impossible for me to judge of his proportions because of the way he was dressed, but he seemed to me to be thin and bloodless. His face was stern and wrinkled. The features were not without delicacy. The mouth, which was rather large, was expressive of an ironical and at the same time a kindly humor. The forehead, which was perhaps too high, had somewhat the same alarming aspect as that of a madman, especially because of the contrast between it and the lower part of the face, which ended abruptly in a small chin very near the lower lip. Eyes of turquoise blue, as keen and intelligent as the Prince de Talleyrand's, which I came to know later, and gifted, like his, with the faculty of depriving themselves of expression, added to the unusualness of that face, which was rather yellow than pale. That coloring

seemed to indicate an irritable disposition and violent passions. The hair, already turning to silver and combed with care, formed alternate black and white furrows across his head. This fastidious arrangement of the hair detracted from the resemblance that I discovered in the count to the extraordinary monk whom Lewis created after Schedoni in the "Confessional of the Black Penitents," a work which is in my judgment superior to "The Monk."

As befitted one who must go early to the Palais, the count was already shaved. Two candelabra with four branches, and supplied with screens, standing at either end of the desk, with the candles still burning, made it evident enough that the magistrate rose before daybreak. His hands, which I noticed when he took hold of the bell-rope to summon his valet, were very beautiful and as white as a woman's.

In telling you this story I misstate the social position and titles of this eminent man, although I place him in a situation analogous to that which he really occupied. Rank, dignity, fortune, manner of life — all these details are accurate; but I do not choose to be false to my benefactor or to my ingrained habit of discretion.

Instead of feeling like what I really was, an insect in the presence of an eagle, I was conscious of an indefinable feeling at sight of the count, which I can explain to-day. Artists of genius [Here the consul bowed gracefully to the ambassador, the famous author, and the two Parisians], genuine statesmen, poets, a general who has commanded armies, in a word, persons who are truly great, are exceedingly simple; and their simplicity places you on a level with them. It may be that you who are mentally superior have observed how sentiment abridges the moral dis-

tances that society has created. If we are inferior to you in intellect, we may equal you by our devotion in friendship. In the temperature — pardon the word — of our hearts, I felt as near to my patron as I was far removed from him in rank. Indeed, the mind has a clairvoyance of its own: it foresees grief, chagrin, joy, evil-speaking, hatred, in another. I detected vaguely the signs of a mystery, when I observed in the count the same physiognomical effects that I had observed in my uncle. The practice of virtue, serenity of conscience, purity of thought, had transformed my uncle from an ugly man into a very handsome one. I detected a metamorphosis in the contrary direction in the count's face: at first glance I thought that he was about fifty-five; but after a careful examination, I discovered traces of youth buried beneath the snows of a profound sorrow, beneath the weariness of persistent study, beneath the wasted hues of a thwarted passion. At a word from my uncle the count's eyes took on for a moment the brightness of a periwinkle, he gave a smile of admiration which showed him to me at what I concluded to be his actual age — about forty. I did not make these observations at the time, but later, on recalling the incidents of that visit.

The footman appeared, bringing a salver on which was his master's breakfast.

"I did not ring for my breakfast," said the count; "however, leave it, and go and show monsieur his apartment."

I followed the footman, who took me to a pretty apartment, supplied with everything, situated on a terrace between the court of honor and the offices, over a gallery leading from the kitchen to the main staircase.

When I returned to the count's study, I heard my uncle pronounce this judgment upon me before I opened the door: —

"He might make a mistake, for he has a big heart, and we all are subject to honorable mistakes; but he has no vices."

"Well," said the count with a kindly glance at me, "do you like it? There are so many apartments in this old barrack, that, if you 're not comfortable there, I'll quarter you somewhere else."

"I had only one room at my uncle's," I replied.

"Well, you can move in this evening," said the count; "for you have, I suppose, about as much furniture as most students — a cab will hold it. To-day we three will dine together," he added, looking at my uncle.

A magnificent library adjoined the count's study; he took us there and showed me a dainty little nook, hung with pictures, which had evidently been used formerly as an oratory.

"This is your cell," he said to me; "you will sit here when you have to work with me; for you won't be chained."

And he described the nature and extent of my duties with him. As I listened, I recognized in him a great instructor in political affairs. I spent about a month familiarizing myself with people and things, studying the duties of my new post, and accustoming myself to the count's ways. A secretary inevitably watches the man who makes use of his services. That man's tastes, passions, disposition, hobbies, became the objects of my involuntary study. The union of two persons in that relation is more and less than a marriage.

For three months Comte Octave and I kept watch upon each other. I learned, to my amazement, that he was only

thirty-seven years old. The purely external tranquillity of his life and his virtuous conduct were not due solely to a deeply-rooted sense of duty, and to stoical reflections. Being in constant intercourse with him, — and he was a most extraordinary person to those who knew him well, — I became conscious of vast depths of feeling beneath his labors, beneath his courteous manners, beneath his mask of kindliness, beneath his attitude of resignation which resembled calmness so closely that any one might be misled. Just as, when one is walking in a forest, certain spots, by the sound they give forth under one's footsteps, disclose the presence of great masses of rock, or of hollow spaces, so masses of egotism concealed beneath the flowers of courtesy, and caverns excavated by unhappiness, give forth a hollow sound at the constant contact of intimate life. Grief, not discouragement, dwelt in that truly great soul. The count had learned that action, that the accomplished fact, is the supreme law of man as a social being. And so he went his appointed way despite concealed wounds, contemplating the future with a serene eye, like a martyr filled with faith. His hidden sadness, the bitter disappointment from which he was suffering, had not lured him into the philosophical steppes of unbelief; that brave-hearted statesman was religious, but without ostentation; he attended the first Mass at Saint-Paul, intended for devout mechanics and servants. None of his friends, no one at court, knew that he attended so faithfully to his religious duties. He cultivated God as some worthy folk cultivate a vice, with profound mystery.

So it was that I was destined to find the count one day upon a mountain of misery much higher than those on which they stand who deem themselves the most sorely tried, who sneer at the passions and beliefs of other people

because they have overcome their own, and who pour out sarcasm and scorn in every key. At that time he had no scornful words for those who follow hope to the swamps into which it leads one, or for those who climb a mountain to isolate themselves, or for those who persist in the struggle and redden the arena with their blood and strew it with their illusions; he viewed the world in its entirety, he rose superior to beliefs, he listened to complaints, he distrusted affection and devotion; but that great, that stern magistrate was compassionate to them, he admired them, not with a temporary enthusiasm, but by his silence, by meditation, by the communion of a deeply touched heart. He was a sort of Catholic Manfred, unstained by crime, mingling curiosity with his faith, melting the snows by the heat of a craterless volcano, holding converse with a star which none but he saw!

I found many obscure places in his outward life. He eluded my glances, not like the traveller who, as he follows the travelled road, disappears now and again in sloughs and ravines, at the pleasure of the inequalities of the ground, but like the skirmisher who is watched for and who looks about in search of cover. I could not explain frequent absences at times when he had most work on hand, but which he made no attempt to conceal, as he would always say, "Go on with this for me," and entrust his work to me.

Profoundly immersed as he was in the threefold obligations of statesman, magistrate, and orator, he attracted me by his taste for flowers, which denotes a beautiful character, and which almost all persons of true refinement have. His garden and his study were full of the most unusual plants, which he always bought, however, after they were withered. Perhaps he liked to contemplate that



image of his destiny! He himself was withered like those dying flowers, whose odor of decomposition caused a strange intoxication in him.

The count loved his country; he devoted himself to public affairs with the intensity of a heart seeking to cheat another passion; but the study and the labor in which he immersed himself were not enough; he suffered from frightful inward combats, of which some echoes reached me. In short, he exhibited symptoms of a heart-rending craving for happiness, and it seemed to me that he ought to be happy. But what was the obstacle? Was he in love with some woman? That was a question I asked myself. Judge of the extent of the circles of grief which my thoughts must have questioned before arriving at so simple and so formidable a query as that.

Despite his efforts, then, my patron did not succeed in stifling the workings of his heart. Under his stern attitude, under the silence of the magistrate, there was stirring a passion held in check so powerfully that no one save myself, his housemate, suspected the secret. His motto seemed to be: "I suffer and say naught."

The train of respect and admiration that followed him, the friendship of untiring workers like himself, of Presidents Grandville and Sérizy, had no effect on the count; either he betrayed nothing to them, or they knew all. Impassive, holding his head erect in public, the count never allowed the man to appear save at rare moments when he was alone in his garden or his study and thought that he was unobserved; but at those moments he was like a child, he gave free vent to the tears concealed beneath his robe, to the paroxysms of emotion which perhaps, if unkindly interpreted, would have injured his reputation as a perspicacious statesman.

When I had arrived at a state of certainty concerning all these matters, Comte Octave had for me all the fascination of a problem, and won my affection as completely as if he had been my father. Can you realize the force of curiosity held in leash by respect? What calamity had struck down that scholar, who, like Pitt, had devoted himself from the age of eighteen to the studies that high office demands, and who had no ambition; that judge, who was familiar with international law, political law, civil law, and criminal law, and who might find therein arms to defeat all sorts of unrest or error; that profound legislator, that serious-minded writer, that religious celibate whose life was sufficient evidence that he was open to no reproach? A criminal would not have been punished more severely by God than my patron was. Grief had robbed him of half his sleep; he was able to sleep only four hours! What sort of battle was he waging during those other hours which were outwardly so placid, studious, without outcry or complaint, when I often surprised him with the pen fallen from his fingers, his head resting on one hand, his eyes like two fixed stars and sometimes wet with tears? How did the water from that living spring continue to flow over the scorching sand without being dried up by the subterranean fire? Was there a bed of granite there, as there is said to be under the sea, between it and the central fires of the globe? And would the volcano ever burst?

Sometimes the count looked at me with the shrewd and far-sighted curiosity with which a man examines another when he is in search of a confederate; then he would avoid my eyes, seeing them open wide, in some sort like a mouth that desires a response and that seems to say, "Do you speak first!" At times, too, Comte Octave was sad, in a savage, sullen way. If the outbreaks of that mood wounded

me, he had the art of making up for it without a word of apology; and his manners then became gracious to the point of Christian humility.

When I had become attached by a genuine filial affection to that man who was such a mystery to me, yet so comprehensible to the world at large, where the word "original" suffices to solve all the enigmas of the heart, I changed the whole aspect of affairs in the house. Neglect of his own interest, on the count's part, had reached the point of utter idiocy in the management of his business. Having an income of about a hundred and sixty thousand francs, in addition to the emoluments of his offices, three of which were not subject to the law against multiplication of salaries, he spent sixty thousand a year, of which at least thirty went to his servants. At the end of the first year I dismissed all those rascals, and urged his Excellency to use his influence to help me find honest men to take their places. At the end of the second year the count was served better and more loyally, and enjoyed all the modern comforts: he had fine horses belonging to a coachman to whom I paid so much a month for each horse; his dinners on his reception-days were served by Chevet at a stipulated price and did him credit; the ordinary provision for the table was entrusted to an excellent cook whom my uncle procured for me, and who had two scullery-maids to assist her. The whole expense, not including purchases, now amounted to less than thirty thousand francs; we had two more servants than before, whose labors restored to the old mansion all its poetic charm; for, beautiful even in its decay, it had a certain majesty which was degraded by neglect.

"I am no longer surprised," he said when I told him of these results, "at the fortunes my people made. In seven

years I have had two cooks become rich restaurant-keepers!"

"You have lost three hundred thousand francs in seven years," I replied. "And you, a magistrate who signs indictments at the Palais, you actually encouraged theft in your own house."

## III.

AT the beginning of the year 1826 the count was evidently through observing me, and we were as closely allied as two men can be when one is subordinate to the other. He had said nothing to me about my future; but he had taken pains, as a master and as a father, to teach me. He often bade me collect the materials of his most arduous tasks; I drew up some of his reports, and he corrected them, pointing out to me the differences between his interpretations of the law, his views and mine. When I had at last produced a document that he could put forth as his own, his pleasure was my sufficient reward, and he saw that I took it so. That little episode had an extraordinary effect upon him, for one outwardly so severe. He judged me, to use a legal phrase, as a court of last resort, and unerringly; he took my head in his hands and kissed me on the brow.

"Maurice," he cried, "you are no longer my secretary; I don't know yet what you will be to me, but if my life goes on as before perhaps you will take the place of a son."

Comte Octave had introduced me in the best houses in Paris, where I went in his stead, with his carriage and servants, on the too frequent occasions, when, being all ready to start, he would change his mind and send for a hired cab, to go — where? There was the mystery. From the welcome I received I could divine the count's sentiments toward me and the seriousness of his com-

mendation. As watchful as a father, he supplied all my needs, with the greater liberality because my silence always compelled him to think for me.

One evening, late in January, 1827, at Madame la Comtesse de Sérizy's, I had such a run of ill luck at cards that I lost two thousand francs, and I did not want to take that amount from my savings. The next day I said to myself:—

“Shall I go and ask my uncle for the money, or shall I confide in the count?”

I took the latter course.

“Last night,” I said to him while he was breakfasting, “I played cards and lost all the time; I was a little piqued and kept on, and I owe two thousand francs. Will you allow me to draw that amount on account of my salary for the year?”

“No,” he said, with a pleasant smile. “When one plays in society, one must have a purse for that purpose. Take six thousand francs and pay your debts; after to-day we will divide losses, for when you represent me, as you do most of the time, your self-esteem must not be wounded.”

I did not thank the count. Thanks would have seemed unnecessary to him. That fact will indicate the nature of our relations. Nevertheless, we had not as yet unlimited confidence in each other; he did not lay open before me the vast subterranean passages which I had discovered in his secret life, and I did not say to him: “What is the matter? with what disease are you suffering?” What did he do during his long evenings away from home? He often returned on foot, or in a hired cab, when I, his secretary, drove home in his carriage! Could it be that so devout a man was the slave of vices that he hypocritically concealed? Was he employing all the powers of his intellect to gratify a jealousy more cunning than Othello's?

Was he living with a woman who was unworthy of him?

One morning, as I was returning from some tradesman's place or other, where I had been to pay a bill, I came upon Comte Octave, between Saint-Paul and the Hôtel de Ville, so engrossed in conversation with an old woman that he did not see me. The old woman's face aroused strange suspicions in my mind — suspicions that seemed the more reasonable because I had no idea what use the count made of his savings. Is it not horrible to think of? — I set myself up as my patron's censor! I knew that at that moment he had more than six hundred thousand francs to invest, and if he had invested them in the public funds, his confidence in me as to everything that concerned his financial dealings was so complete that I must have known it.

Sometimes he walked in his garden in the morning, pacing back and forth like a man to whom walking was the hippogriff for a melancholy meditation to ride. He would walk and walk, rubbing his hands as if he would rub off the skin! And when I took him by surprise, meeting him at a bend in a path, I saw his face fairly beaming. His eyes, instead of the hard blue of the turquoise, assumed the velvety softness of the periwinkle which had so impressed me at the time of my first visit, because of the astonishing contrast between those two expressions: the expression of the happy man and of the unhappy man. Twice or thrice, at such times, he had grasped me by the arm and led me along beside him, saying: "What do you want of me?" instead of pouring his happiness into my heart, which opened to receive it.

More frequently, since I had become competent to replace him in his tasks and to draw his reports, he would

stand for hours at a time gazing at the gold fish swimming in a beautiful marble basin in the centre of his garden, about which the loveliest flowers formed a sort of amphitheatre. Grave statesman that he was, he seemed to have succeeded in imparting a passionate interest to the mechanical pleasure of tossing crumbs of bread to fish!

I proceed to tell you how I discovered the drama of that secret life, so profoundly agitated and perturbed, in which, in a circle that Dante forgot to describe in his *Inferno*, ghastly joys were born.

[Here the consul-general paused. After a moment, he continued:—]

On a certain Monday, chance willed that Monsieur le Président de Grandville and Monsieur de Sérizy, then vice-president of the Council of State, should come to Comte Octave's to attend a meeting of a committee of which the three were members and I the secretary. The count had already procured my appointment as auditor to the Council of State. All the data necessary in the examination of the political question secretly submitted to the three gentlemen were lying on one of the long tables in our library. Messieurs de Grandville and de Sérizy had turned over to Comte Octave the preliminary scrutiny of the documents relating to their task. In order to avoid the necessity of transporting the papers to Monsieur de Sérizy's, who was chairman of the committee, they had agreed to meet on rue Payenne. The cabinet at the Tuileries attached great importance to the work, which fell upon me mainly, and to which I owed my appointment as master of requests in the course of that year.

Although Messieurs de Grandville and de Sérizy, whose habits were very similar to my patron's, never dined away from home, we were still busily discussing the matter in



hand at so late an hour that the footman finally sent for me and said: —

“Messieurs the curés of Saint-Paul and the Blancs-Manteaux have been waiting in the salon two hours.”

It was nine o'clock!

“Here you are, messieurs, compelled to attend a dinner of curés,” said Comte Octave laughingly to his colleagues. “I don't know whether Grandville can overcome his repugnance for the cassock.”

“That depends on the curés.”

“Oh! one of them's my uncle, and the other Abbé Gaudron,” I replied. “Have no fear; Abbé Fontanon is no longer vicar of Saint-Paul.”

“Well, let us dine,” rejoined Président de Grandville. “A zealot alarms me, but I know nobody so entertaining as a genuinely pious man!”

We adjourned to the dining-room. It was a delightful dinner. Men who are really well informed, politicians to whom public service gives thorough experience and the habit of talking, are admirable story-tellers, when they know how to tell a story. There is no happy medium with them — they are either horribly dull or sublime. At that fascinating sport Prince Metternich is as expert as Charles Nodier. Cut on many sides, like the diamond, the statesman's wit is clear, sparkling, and full of good sense.

Assured that the proprieties would be observed by those three superior men, my uncle allowed his wit free play — a refined wit, of penetrating sweetness, and shrewd withal, like that of all men accustomed to conceal their thoughts beneath their robe. Be sure, too, that there was nothing commonplace or idle in that *causerie*, which might well be compared, as to its effect on the mind, to Rossini's music. Abbé Gaudron was, as Monsieur de Grandville said, a

St. Peter rather than a St. Paul, a peasant filled with faith, square at base and summit alike, a priestly ox, whose ignorance in respect to society and literature enlivened the conversation by naïve explosions of amazement and by unexpected questions.

The talk fell finally upon one of the sores inherent in the social state and which we have just been discussing — adultery. My uncle remarked upon the contradiction which the framers of the Code, still under the spell of the revolutionary tempests, enacted therein between the civil law and the religious law, and which was, in his opinion, the source of all the difficulty.

“In the eye of the Church,” he said, “adultery is a crime; in your courts it is only a misdemeanor. The adulterer rides in a carriage to the police court, instead of sitting in the dock at the assizes. Napoleon’s Council of State, moved by sympathy for the guilty woman, showed a great lack of understanding. Surely in this matter the civil and religious law should be made to harmonize, and the guilty wife be sent to the convent for the rest of her life, as formerly.”

“To the convent!” rejoined Monsieur de Sérizy; “we should have to provide convents first of all, and in these days monasteries are being transformed into barracks. And then, monsieur l’abbé, can you really think of such a thing as turning over to God what society will have none of?”

“Oh!” said the Comte de Grandville, “you don’t know France. They felt bound to leave the husband the right to enter a complaint; well, there are n’t ten complaints a year for adultery.”

“Monsieur l’abbé is preaching for his saint, for it was Jesus Christ who created adultery,” observed Comte

Octave. "In the East, the cradle of mankind, woman was a mere source of pleasure, and was only a chattel; all that was asked of her was obedience and beauty. By placing the mind above the body, the modern European family, Jesus' child, invented indissoluble marriage and made it a sacrament."

"Ah! the Church foresaw all the difficulties in the way," exclaimed Monsieur de Grandville.

"That institution produced a new society," replied the count with a smile; "but the morals of that society will never be those of climates where the female is marriageable at the age of seven, and more than old at twenty-five. The Catholic Church has overlooked the necessities of one half of the globe. So let us confine ourselves to Europe. Is woman inferior to us, or superior? that is the real question so far as we are concerned. If woman is inferior to us, then to raise her as high as the Church has done, necessitates the severest punishment for adultery. And so, in the old days, this was the procedure: the cloister or death — that was the sum total of the old legislation. But, since then, law has been modified by morals, as always. The throne has served as a bed for the adulterer, and the progress of that alluring crime has marked the weakening of the dogmas of the Catholic Church. To-day, when the Church demands nothing more than sincere repentance from the sinning woman, society is content with a smirch instead of punishment. The law condemns many culprits, but it no longer intimidates them. In short, there are two sorts of morality, the morality of society and the morality of the Code. Where the Code is weak, I agree with our dear abbé, society is impudent and sneering. There are few judges who would not gladly have committed the misdemeanor against which they hurl the not unkindly

thunderbolts of their *whereases*. Society, which gives the law the lie in its festivities and by its customs, and by its amusements, is harsher than the Code and the Church: society punishes bungling after encouraging hypocrisy. The theory of the law of marriage seems to me to be erroneous from top to bottom. The French law would be perfect perhaps if it provided for the exheredation of daughters."

"We three are familiar with the question root and branch," laughed the Comte de Grandville. "I have a wife with whom I can't live. Sérizy has a wife who won't live with him. Your wife left you, Octave. So that we three between us represent every variety of conjugal conscience; and if we ever take up the question of divorce again, we three shall form the commission, no doubt."

Octave's fork fell on his glass, and broke it and the plate. He turned pale as death and cast at the Comte de Grandville a withering glance, with a slant in my direction, which I caught on the wing.

"Forgive me, my friend, I did n't see Maurice," continued Président de Grandville. "Sérizy and I were your confederates after acting as your witnesses; so that I did n't think it was indiscreet of me to speak in the presence of these two venerable clergymen."

Monsieur de Sérizy changed the subject by telling all that he had done to please his wife, without success. The old man argued therefrom the impossibility of regulating human sympathies and antipathies by rule of thumb; he maintained that the social law is never more perfect than when it approximates natural law. Now, Nature takes no account of the alliance of hearts, its end being attained by propagation of the race. Therefore the present Code was exceedingly wise in leaving an

enormous latitude to chance. The exheredation of daughters, so long as there were male heirs, was an excellent provision, whether to avoid the debasement of families, or to make happier households by suppressing scandalous connections and making moral qualities and beauty the only desiderata.

"But," he added, raising his hand in a gesture of disgust, "how is legislation to be made perfect in a country that has the folly to employ seven or eight hundred legislators! After all," he added, "if I am sacrificed, I have a child to succeed me."

"Putting aside all religious questions," said my uncle, "I will call your Excellency's attention to the fact that Nature owes us life simply, and that society owes us happiness. Are you a father?"

"And I — have I children?" said Comte Octave in a hollow voice; and his tone caused such a profound impression that there was no further talk of women or of marriage.

When we had taken our coffee, the two counts and the two curés made their escape, seeing that poor Octave had fallen into a fit of brooding melancholy which made him oblivious to their successive disappearances. He was seated on a couch, in the chimney-corner, in the attitude of one crushed to earth.

"You know now the secret of my life," he said, when he saw that we were alone. "After I had been married three years, a letter was handed me one evening, when I came home — a letter in which the countess told me of her flight. The letter was not lacking in dignity, for it is a part of woman's nature to retain some virtue even when she commits that horrible sin. To-day, my wife is supposed to have sailed on a vessel that was wrecked; she is

thought to be dead. I have lived alone seven years! — Enough for to-night, Maurice. We will talk of my situation when I am used to the idea of discussing it with you. When one is suffering from a chronic disease, one has to accustom one's self to feeling better, you know. Often the improvement seems to be another phase of the disease."

I went to bed thoroughly upset, for the mystery, far from being solved, seemed more obscure than ever. I had a boding sense of a strange drama being enacted, for I realized that it could have been no ordinary bond between such a wife as the count would choose and a character like his. And the incidents which had impelled the countess to leave a man so noble, so agreeable, so perfect, so loving, so worthy to be loved, must have been unusual, to say the least. Monsieur de Grandville's words had been like a torch thrown into the underground passages over which I had been walking so long; and although its flame lighted them but dimly, I was able to see their extent. I attempted to explain the count's suffering, without understanding its depth or its bitterness. That yellow mask, those wrinkled temples, those never-ending labors, those moments of musing, — the most trivial details of that wedded celibate's life appeared in brilliant relief during that hour of reflection which is, as it were, the twilight of sleep, and to which every man of heart would have yielded as I did.

Ah! how dearly I loved my patron! he seemed sublime to me. I read a whole epic of melancholy, I discovered an untiring activity in that heart which I had accused of indolence. Does not supreme grief always reach the stage of immobility? That magistrate, who had so much power and influence — had he avenged himself? was he gloating over somebody's long-drawn agony? Is there not something unusual, even in Paris, in wrath that remains at the

boiling-point for seven years? What had Octave been doing since that great disaster? for the separation of husband and wife is the greatest of disasters in our time, when private life has become, what it never was before, a social question.

We passed several days in mutual observation, for great sorrows have a modesty of their own; but at last the count said to me one evening, in a grave tone: —

“Stay!”

This is what he told me, almost in his own words.

## IV.

"My father had a ward, rich and beautiful, and about sixteen years old when I came home from school to this old house. Brought up by my mother, Honorine was just waking to life. Overflowing with graceful, childish ways, she dreamed of happiness as she would have dreamed of a jewel, and it may be that happiness was to her the soul's jewel. Her piety was not without its childish joys, for everything, even religion, was a poem to that innocent heart. She looked forward to her future as an unending fête. Innocent and pure, no agitation had ever disturbed her slumbers. Shame and disappointment had never paled her cheek or dimmed the candor of her glance. She did not even try to guess the secret of her involuntary emotion on a lovely day in spring. In short, she felt that she was a weak creature, destined to lifelong obedience, and she awaited marriage without desiring it. Her cheerful imagination knew nothing of the corruption (necessary, perhaps) with which literature inoculates us by its depiction of the passions. She knew nothing of the world or of the perils of society. The dear child had suffered so little that she had never even unfolded her courage. Indeed, her innocence would have enabled her to walk fearlessly among serpents, like the ideal figure of Innocence conceived by some painter. Never was a brow more serene and, at the same time, more cheerful than hers. Never were lips privileged to deprive of all sinister meaning questions propounded with such absolute ignorance.



"We lived together like brothers. At the end of a year I said to her, in the garden yonder, as we were tossing bread to the fish in the basin: —

"‘Would you like to be married? With me for your husband, you shall do whatever you like; while another man might make you unhappy.’

"‘Mamma,’ she said to my mother, who came toward us at that moment, ‘Octave and I have agreed that we’ll marry.’

"‘At seventeen?’ said my mother. ‘No, you must wait eighteen months; and if, eighteen months hence, you suit each other, why, you are of equal rank and fortune, and your marriage will be one of *convenience* and of inclination, too.’

"When I was twenty-six and Honorine nineteen we were married. Our respect for my father and mother, old people of the old court, debarred us from making the house accord with present fashions, changing the furniture and the rest, and we lived on here as before, like children. However, I went into society, introduced my wife to social life, and considered it one of my duties to educate her. I realized later that in marriages contracted under such conditions as ours there is one dangerous reef upon which many affections, many virtuous resolutions, many lives, must inevitably be wrecked. The husband becomes a pedagogue, a professor if you prefer; and love dies under the ferrule, which, sooner or later, makes a painful wound; for a wife, young and lovely, virtuous and light of heart, admits no qualities superior to those with which she is endowed by nature. Perhaps I was to blame. Perhaps, in the difficult beginnings of married life, I assumed too masterful a tone. On the other hand, perhaps I made the mistake of trusting too implicitly to that guileless nature,

and so did not keep an eye on the countess, in whom I deemed the mere idea of revolt impossible. Alas! not as yet do we know, either in politics or in married life, whether empires and happiness perish from over-confidence or over-severity. Perhaps Honorine's husband did not fulfil her maiden dreams. Who knows, during his happy days, what precepts he has failed to follow?"

I recall only the main heads in the reproaches which the count heaped upon himself with the sincerity of the anatomist seeking causes of a disease which might have eluded his confrères; but his kindly indulgence seemed to me truly on a par with that of Jesus Christ when he saved the woman taken in adultery.

"Eighteen months after the death of my father, who preceded my mother to the grave by several months," he continued after a pause, "came the terrible night when I was thunderstruck by Honorine's farewell letter. By what poetic glamour was my wife seduced? Was it the senses? Was it the magnetism of misfortune or of genius? Which of those forces surprised her or led her astray? I never tried to learn. The blow was so cruel that I was like one paralyzed for a month. Later, reflection bade me to continue in my ignorance, and Honorine's misfortunes have apprized me of too much. Thus far, Maurice, the whole story is commonplace to the last degree; but that will all be changed by a single word: I love Honorine, I have never ceased to adore her! Since the day she deserted me I have lived on my memories, I have gone over and over, one by one, the pleasures for which, doubtless, Honorine had no taste.

"Oh!" he continued, when he saw the astonishment in my eyes, "don't make a hero of me — don't think me idiotic enough, a colonel of the Empire would say, not to

have sought distraction. Alas! my boy, I was either too young, or too much in love: I have n't been able to find another woman in the whole world. After ghastly struggles with myself, I tried to forget myself; I went, cash in hand, to the threshold of infidelity; but there, like a white statue, the memory of Honorine stood in my path. As I recalled the indescribable delicacy of that smooth skin through which you could see the blood flow and the nerves throb; as I looked upon that ingenuous face, as innocent on the eve of my misfortune as on the day when I said to her, 'would you like to be married?' as there came to my nostrils a perfume as divine as that of virtue; as I recognized the gleam of her eyes, the *prettiness* of her gestures, I fled like a man who is on the point of violating a grave and sees the dead man's transfigured soul come forth. At the Council, at the Palais, in my long nights, I dream so constantly of Honorine, that I need the utmost strength of will to give my mind to what I am doing and what I am saying. That is the secret of my persistent labors. Well! I had no more feeling of anger against her than a father has when he sees his cherished child in danger through his imprudence. I realized that I had made of my wife a poem which I enjoyed with such blind intoxication that I thought that my intoxication was shared by her. Ah, Maurice! undiscerning love in a husband is a mistake which may pave the way to all a wife's errors! Probably I had left without employment that child's faculties, while I was cherishing her as a child; perhaps I wearied her with my love before the hour of love had struck for her. Too young to see the mother's devotion in the wife's constancy, she mistook that first test of marriage for life itself; and the rebellious child cursed life unknown to me, not daring to complain to me — for very shame, perhaps. In

such a cruel plight, she must have found herself defenceless against a man who appealed powerfully to her emotions. And I, who am called such a sagacious magistrate, whose heart is so tender, but whose mind was preoccupied — I divined too late those unknown laws of the feminine code, and read them only by the light of the conflagration that consumed my home. Thereupon I made my heart a court, by virtue of the law; for the law makes the husband a judge: I acquitted my wife and convicted myself. But then love assumed the form of passion, of that cowardly, all-engrossing passion which attacks some old men. To-day I love Honorine, absent, as one loves, at sixty, a woman whom one is determined to possess at any price, and I feel that I have a young man's vigor. I have the old man's audacity with the shyness of youth. My boy, society has naught but mockery for such a ghastly conjugal plight as mine. Where it is moved to tears for a lover, it looks upon a husband as an image of impotence and sneers at him who is unable to keep a wife acquired under the ægis of the Church and of the mayor's scarf of office. And I had to hold my peace! Sérizy is fortunate. He owes to his indulgence the privilege of seeing his wife, he protects and defends her; and as he adores her, he knows the exceeding great joy of the benefactor who is disturbed by nothing, not even by ridicule, for he baptizes his paternal enjoyment therein.

“‘I stay married only on my wife's account!’ he said to me one day as we were leaving the Council.

“But I — I have nothing, not even ridicule to defy, for I live upon an unnourished love! I, who cannot think of a word to say to a woman! I, whom prostitution disgusts! I, who am loyal as if by witchcraft! But for my religious faith, I should have killed myself! I defied the abyss of

work, I plunged into it, and came forth alive, ardent, having lost the power to sleep!"

I cannot recall the exact words of that eloquent man, to whom passion imparted an eloquence so immeasurably superior to that of the tribune that the tears rolled down my cheeks as I listened. Fancy my sensations when, after a pause during which we wiped away our tears, he concluded his narrative with this revelation.

"Such is the drama going on in my heart, but it is not the visible drama that is being played at this moment in Paris! The first has no interest to any one. I am well aware of it, and you will realize it some day, you who weep with me now: no one ever takes another person's sorrow upon his heart or his epidermis. The measure of our sorrows is within ourselves. Even you yourself do not understand my sufferings except by a very ill-defined analogy. Can you imagine me assuaging the most violent frenzies of despair by gazing upon a miniature wherein my eye sees and kisses her brow, the smile upon her lips, the outline of her face; wherein I inhale the whiteness of her skin; and which enables me almost to feel, to fondle the black tresses of her curly hair? Have you ever surprised me when I was bounding with hope, when I was writhing beneath the innumerable arrows of despair, when I was tramping the streets of Paris to conquer my impatience by fatigue? I have fits of exhaustion like those of consumptives, outbreaks of insane merriment, the apprehensions of a murderer when he meets a sergeant of gendarmes! In short, my life is a constant paroxysm of terror, joy, despair. As for the drama, it is this: You fancy me engrossed by the Council of State, the Chamber, the Palais, politics generally. Why, great Heaven! seven hours of the night are sufficient for everything, the life I lead has so over-

quicken my faculties. Honorine is my most urgent business. To win back my wife, — that is my sole preoccupation; to watch over her in the cage in which she now is, without letting her know that she is in my power; to satisfy her needs, to provide for the little amusement that she allows herself, to be constantly hovering about her, like a sylph, and not allow my presence to be known or suspected — for my whole future would be ruined; that is my life, my true life! For seven years I have never gone to bed without going first to look at the light of her night-lamp, or her shadow on the window curtain. She left my house taking nothing but what she wore that day. The child carried nobility of feeling to the point of idiocy. And eighteen months after her flight she was deserted by her lover, who was frightened by the cold, stern, forbidding, evil-smelling aspect of poverty — the dastard! Doubtless he had counted upon the happy, gilded existence in Switzerland and Italy, which great ladies are wont to lead when they leave their husbands. Honorine had sixty thousand francs a year of her own. The villain left the dear girl enceinte and without a sou! In 1820, in November, I induced the best *accoucheur* in Paris to play the part of a humble suburban surgeon. I induced the curé of the parish in which the countess was living to provide for her needs, as if he were performing an act of charity. To conceal my wife's name, to insure her *incognito*, to find a housekeeper for her who was devoted to me and who would be an intelligent confidante — God! that was a task worthy of Figaro! You understand that, to discover my wife's place of refuge, it was enough for me to put my mind to it. After three months of desperation rather than despair, the idea of devoting myself to Honorine's welfare, taking God for my confidant, came to me

like one of the poems which are born only in a lover's heart! Every exclusive passion demands something to feed upon. Was it not my duty to protect that child, guilty solely through my imprudence, against fresh disasters? to perform at last my rôle of guardian angel? After seven months of careful nursing, the boy died, luckily for her and for me. For nine months my wife hovered between life and death, deserted at the moment when she was most in need of a man's strong arm; but that arm," he said, putting out his own with a gesture of angelic energy, "was extended over her head. Honorine was nursed as carefully as if she had been in her own house. When, after she had recovered, she asked how and by whom she had been assisted, she was told by the Sisters of Charity of the quarter — by the Maternity Society — by the curé of the parish, who was much interested in her. That woman, whose pride goes so far as to be almost a vice, displayed in misfortune a power of resistance which, at certain times, I call mulish obstinacy. Honorine insisted on earning her living! My wife, work! For five years past I have kept her in a pretty little cottage on rue Saint-Maur, where she makes flowers and hats. She thinks that she sells the product of her dainty workmanship to a dealer, who pays her enough to make her day's work worth twenty francs; and in five years she has not conceived a single suspicion. She pays for all the necessities of life about a third of what they are worth, so that with six thousand francs a year she lives as if she had fifteen thousand. She has a passion for flowers and pays three hundred francs to a gardener, who costs me twelve hundred francs in wages and who presents a bill for two thousand francs every three months. I have promised him a market-garden and a gardener's house adjoining the concierge's lodge

on rue Saint-Maur. The property belongs to me, and stands in the name of one of the ushers of the court. A single indiscretion on the gardener's part would result in his losing everything. Honorine has her little house, a garden, a superb greenhouse, for five hundred francs a year. She lives there, under the name of her house-keeper, Madame Gobain, an old woman whom I found, whose discretion is proof against everything, and whose heart she has won. But her zeal, like the gardener's, is maintained by the promise of a reward on the day of my triumph. The concierge and his wife are terribly expensive, for the same reasons. However, for three years Honorine has been happy; she thinks that she owes to her own labor the luxury of her flowers, as well as her clothes and her well-being.

"Oh! I know what you are going to say," the count exclaimed, spying a question in my eyes and on my lips. "Yes, yes, I have made one attempt. My wife formerly lived in Faubourg Saint-Antoine. One day when, on the strength of La Gobain's statements, I believed that there was a chance of a reconciliation, I sent, by the post, a letter in which I tried to prevail upon my wife — a letter that I had written and rewritten twenty times! I will not try to describe my agony. I went from rue Payenne to rue de Reuilly, like a condemned man going from the Palais to the Hôtel de Ville; but he goes in a tumbril, and I walked! It was dark and foggy; I went to meet Madame Gobain, who was to come and tell me what my wife had done. On recognizing my writing, Honorine had thrown my letter into the fire without reading it!

"‘Madame Gobain,’ she had said, ‘I don't want to be in this house to-morrow!’

"Was that like a dagger-thrust, think you, to a man who



takes boundless delight in the trickery by which he procures the finest Lyon velvet at twelve francs the ell, and pheasants and fish and fruit at a tenth of their value, for a woman so ignorant as to think that two hundred and fifty francs is a sufficient wage for Madame Gobain, who was cook to a bishop! You have sometimes caught me rubbing my hands and enjoying something like happiness. Well, I had just succeeded in carrying out a ruse worthy of the stage. I had deceived my wife, had sent her through a mantua-maker an India shawl offered as coming from an actress, who had hardly worn it; but I, the solemn magistrate whom you know, had slept in it a whole night! And to-day my whole life may be summed up in the words with which we can express the most excruciating torture: 'I love and I am waiting.' I have in Madame Gobain a faithful spy upon that beloved heart. I go every night to talk with the old woman, to learn from her everything that Honorine has done during the day, the most trivial words she has said — for a single exclamation may betray to me the secrets of that heart which has forced itself to be deaf and dumb. Honorine is religious: she attends all the services, she prays, but she has never been to confession and does not attend communion: she foresees what a priest would say to her. She does not choose to listen to advice, or a command, to return to me. That horror of me terrifies and puzzles me, for I have never done Honorine the slightest injury; I was always kind to her. Let us admit that I was sometimes a little sharp when I was teaching her, that my sarcasms wounded her legitimate maidenly pride; was that a reason for persevering in a resolution which only the most implacable hatred can inspire? Honorine has never told Madame Gobain who she is; she maintains absolute silence concerning her marriage, so

that that excellent and worthy woman cannot say a word in my favor, for she is the only one in the house who knows my secret. The others know nothing of it; they are under the spell of the terror caused by the name of the prefect of police, and of reverence for the power of a minister. It is impossible for me to make my way into that heart: the citadel is mine, but I cannot enter it. I have but one method of procedure. An act of violence would ruin me forever! How is one to combat arguments that one does not know? Shall I write a letter, have it copied by a public writer, and put before Honorine? I have thought of that. But shall I not risk making her move again? Her last moving cost me fifteen thousand francs.

“The purchase was made in the first place in the name of the secretary whom you succeeded. The wretch, having no idea how light my sleep is, was surprised by me opening with a false key the strong-box in which I had put the deed. I coughed and he had a panic; the next day I compelled him to transfer the house to my present agent, and I discharged him.

“Ah! if I did not feel within me all the noble faculties of man, full-blown, abundantly employed, and happy; if the elements of my rôle were not a part of the divine pater-nity; if I did not enjoy through every pore, there are times when I should believe that I am the victim of a monomania. Some nights I hear the jingle of Folly’s bells; I am afraid of these violent transitions from a faint hope, which sometimes gleams and soars aloft, to an utter despair which falls as low as men can fall. A few days ago I meditated seriously upon the ghastly end of Lovelace’s relations with Clarissa, saying to myself:—

“‘If Honorine had a child by me, would n’t she be compelled to return to my house?’

"In fact, I have such absolute confidence in a happy future, that ten months ago I bought and paid for one of the finest houses in Faubourg Saint-Honoré. If I win back Honorine, I don't want her to see this house again, or the room from which she fled. I propose to bestow my idol in a new temple, where she can believe that she will lead an entirely new life. They are at work making the other house a marvel of taste and elegance. I have heard of a poet who went almost insane for love of a singer, and who, at the beginning of his passion, bought the most gorgeous bed in Paris, knowing nothing as to how the artist would receive his love. Well, there is one man, the most cold-blooded of magistrates, the man who is considered the most dignified counsellor of the Crown, whom that anecdote stirred in every fibre of his heart. The orator of the Chamber comprehends the poet who nourishes his ideal with a material possibility. Three days before the arrival of Marie Louise, Napoleon lay in his wedding-bed at Compiègne. All gigantic passions go the same pace. I love as a poet did, and an emperor!"

When I heard those last words I thought that Comte Octave's fears were realized: he had risen and was pacing the floor and waving his arms; but he checked himself, as if alarmed by the vehemence of his language.

"I am ridiculous beyond words," he resumed, after a long pause, imploring a compassionate glance.

"No, monsieur, you are most unhappy."

"Oh, yes," he said, taking up the thread of his confidential discourse, "more so than you think! From the violence of my words, you may well, nay, you must argue the most intense physical passion, since it has deadened all my faculties for nine years; but it is nothing compared with the adoration kindled in one by the mind, the wit,

the heart, the manners — everything in woman which is not woman: in a word, those entrancing divinities of the suite of Love, with whom one passes one's life, and who are the daily poem of a fleeting pleasure. By a phenomenon of retrospection I see those charms of Honorine's heart and mind to which I paid little heed in my day of happiness, like all happy people! From day to day I have realized the extent of my loss as I recalled the divine qualities with which she was endowed, that capricious and rebellious child who has grown so strong under the heavy hand of poverty, under the crushing blow of a dastardly desertion. And that celestial flower is withering in solitude and in hiding! — Ah! the law of which we were talking," he continued with bitter irony, "the law means a detachment of gendarmes to seize my wife and bring her here by force. What would that be but winning a dead body? Religion has no hold on her; she cares only for the poesy of it, she prays without listening to the commands of the Church. I have exhausted every resource in the way of kindness, indulgence, and love. I have reached the end. Only one possible means of triumph remains: the craft and patience by dint of which bird-hunters finally snare the most suspicious, the most active, the shyest, and the rarest birds. And so, Maurice, when Monsieur de Grandville's pardonable indiscretion revealed the secret of my life to you, I came at last to look upon that incident as one of the behests of fate, one of those decrees which gamblers seek and listen to in the midst of their most desperate games. Are you fond enough of me to show the devotion of a hero of romance?"

"I see what you mean, monsieur le comte; I divine your purpose. Your former secretary tried to pick the

lock of your strong-box; I know the heart of the present one: he might fall in love with your wife, and can you doom him to misery by sending him into the fire? Is it possible to put one's hand into the flame without burning one's self?"

"You are a child," replied the count; "I will send you safely gloved. It is not my secretary who will take up his quarters on rue Saint-Maur, but my second cousin, Baron de l'Hostal, master of requests."

## V.

AFTER a moment of amazement, I heard a bell ring, and a carriage drove up to the door. A moment later the footman announced Madame de Courteville and her daughter.

Comte Octave had a very large number of relations on his mother's side. Madame de Courteville, his cousin, was the widow of a judge of the Tribunal of the Seine, who had left her with a daughter and without means. What comparison could there be between a woman of twenty-nine and a girl of twenty, as beautiful as the imagination could desire an ideal mistress to be?

"Baron, master of requests, referendary to the Great Seal, pending something better, and this old mansion for a marriage-portion — are those reasons enough for not falling in love with the countess?" he whispered to me as he took my hand and presented me to Madame de Courteville and her daughter.

I was dazzled, not by that list of favors of which I should never have dreamed, but by Amélie de Courteville, all of whose charms were heightened by one of those crafty toilets which mothers arrange for their daughters when it's a question of finding a husband for them.

But let us not talk about myself.

Twenty days later I took up my abode in the market-gardener's cottage, which had been cleaned and furnished with the celerity which is explained by three words: Paris! French workmen! money! I was as deeply in love as the

count could possibly wish for his own security. Would the prudence of a young man of twenty-five suffice for the stratagems which I was about to undertake, and in which a friend's happiness was at stake? To solve that question I admit that I relied mainly on my uncle, for I was authorized by the count to take him into our confidence in case I should consider his intervention necessary.

I hired a gardener, I made myself a florist with whom floriculture was a mania, I busied myself frenetically, like a man whom nothing could turn aside, in digging up the garden and selecting plots for the cultivation of flowers. Like the maniacs of Holland and England, I represented myself as a monoflorist: I made a specialty of dahlias, raising every variety.

You will suspect that my line of conduct, even in its most trivial details, was marked out by the count, all of whose intellectual faculties were at that time engrossed by the slightest incidents of the tragi-comedy to be played on rue Saint-Maur. As soon as the countess had retired, almost every evening, between eleven o'clock and midnight, Octave, Madame Gobain, and I took counsel together. I heard the old woman detail to Octave every movement of his wife during the day. He asked about everything —meals, occupations, demeanor, the menu for the next day, the flowers she proposed to copy. I realized what a passion in despair is, when it is made up of the threefold love that proceeds from the head, the heart, and the senses. Octave lived only during that hour.

During the two months that the work lasted, I did not once turn my eyes on the little cottage in which my neighbor lived. I did not even ask if I had a neighbor, although the countess's garden and mine were separated only by a paling, along which she had planted cypresses that were

already four feet high. One fine morning Madame Gobain announced to her mistress, as a great calamity, the purpose manifested by an idiot who had recently become her neighbor to have a wall built between the two gardens at the end of the year.

I will say nothing of the curiosity by which I was consumed. To see the countess! that longing overshadowed my dawning love for Amélie de Courteville. My scheme of building a wall was simply a wretched threat. No more air then for Honorine, whose garden would become little more than a path between my wall and her pavilion. The latter, built for a place of recreation, resembled a house of cards; it was about thirty feet deep and a hundred feet long. The façade, painted in the German style, represented a flower-covered trellis up to the first floor, and was a charming specimen of the Pompadour style so well named *rococo*. It was reached by a long avenue of lindens. The flower-garden and my kitchen-garden were like the two sides of an axe, the avenue representing the handle. My wall would chip off three-quarters of the axe.

The countess was in despair.

"What sort of man is this florist, my dear Gobain?" she asked.

"Faith," was the reply, "I don't know whether it's possible to tame him; he seems to have a horror of women. He's the nephew of a Paris curé. I've only seen the uncle once — a fine old man of seventy-five, very ugly, but very agreeable. It may be, as some people say in the neighborhood, that the curé supports his nephew in his passion for flowers, so that nothing worse may happen."

"What, pray?"

"Well, your neighbor's a scatterbrain," said La Gobain, shaking her head.



Harmless lunatics are the only men of whom women conceive no suspicion in the matter of sentiment. You will see in the sequel how keen the count's insight was when he selected me for that rôle.

"Why, what's the matter with him?" queried the countess.

"He has studied too hard," La Gobain replied; "he has turned savage. However, he has reasons for not caring for women — if you insist upon knowing all that people say."

"Well," rejoined Honorine, "fools don't frighten me so much as wise men; I'll speak to him myself. If I do not succeed, I'll speak to the curé."

On the day following this conversation, as I was walking among the paths I had marked out, I saw the curtains of a window on the first floor of the pavilion put aside, and a woman's face on the watch. La Gobain accosted me. I looked sharply at the pavilion and made a surly gesture, as if to say: "Bah! I care nothing for your mistress!"

"Madame," said La Gobain, returning to the countess to render an account of her embassy, "the madman requested me to leave him in peace, declaring that even the charcoal-burner was master in his own hovel, especially when he has n't a wife."

"He is doubly right," said the countess.

"Yes, but he said at last: 'I'll go to see her!' when I told him that he would inflict an injury on a lady who lived in retirement, and who derived great consolation from cultivating flowers."

The next day I learned by a signal from La Gobain that my visit was awaited. After the countess's breakfast, when she was walking in front of her house, I broke through the fence and went to her. I was dressed like a countryman:

old gray swanskin trousers with feet, heavy wooden shoes, an old hunting jacket, with a cap on my head and a dilapidated silk handkerchief round my neck; my hands were dirt-begrimed and I had a hoe.

"Madame, this gentleman is your new neighbor," said La Gobain.

The countess did not take fright. At last I saw the woman whom the count's conduct and disclosures had made me so eager to see. It was early in May. The clear air, the blue sky, the tender verdure of the first leaves, the odor of spring, formed the frame of that handiwork of grief. When my eyes fell upon Honorine, I understood Octave's passion and the truth of that expression of his: "a celestial flower."

First of all her pallor impressed me by its peculiar shade of white; for there are as many different whites as there are blues and reds. As one looked at the countess, one seemed to touch with the eye that soft skin beneath which the blood flowed in bluish threads. At the slightest emotion that blood spread beneath the skin like vapor, in rosy sheets. When we met, the sunbeams, shining through the sparse foliage of the acacias, encompassed Honorine with the yellow, vapory halo that Raphael and Titian, alone among painters, succeeded in painting about the head of the Virgin. Dark brown eyes expressed at once gentleness and a joyous temperament; their brilliancy was reflected on the face through long, downcast lashes. By the movement of her satiny eyelids Honorine cast a spell upon me, so much there was of feeling, of majesty, of terror, of scorn, in her way of raising and lowering those veils of the mind. She could freeze or vivify you by a glance. Her *cendré* locks, carelessly arranged on top of her head, outlined a poet's brow, high and forceful and meditative. The mouth

was altogether voluptuous. Lastly, — a rare privilege in France, but common in Italy, — all the lines, the whole contour of the head, were of a majestic type likely to defy the ravages of time.

Although slender, Honorine was not thin, and her form seemed to me one of those which rearouse love when it believes itself to be exhausted. She well deserved the epithet *mignonne*, for she belonged to that type of easily led little women who allow themselves to be taken up, petted, put away and taken up again, like cats. Her little feet, which I heard on the gravel, made a faint sound which was peculiar to them, and which was in tune with the rustling of her gown; the result was a sort of feminine music which engraved itself on the heart, and could be distinguished among the steps of a thousand women. Her carriage reminded one of all her quarterings of nobility with such becoming pride that the most audacious plebeians could but stand aside for her in the street. Merry, tender, proud, and imposing, one could not imagine her otherwise than as endowed with those qualities which seem to exclude one another, and which none the less left her a child. But the child might become as strong of heart as the angel; and like the angel, once wounded in her sensitive nature, she was sure to be implacable.

A cold expression upon that face doubtless meant death to them upon whom her eyes had smiled, for whom her lips had parted; for them whose hearts had heard the melody of the voice which imparted to speech the poetic charm of music by virtue of an intonation that was hers alone.

When I smelt the perfume of violet that she exhaled, I understood how the memory of her had arrested the count on the threshold of debauchery, and how impossible it was to forget one who was in very truth a flower to the touch, a

flower to the eye, a flower to the smell, a celestial flower to the soul. Honorine inspired devotion, a chivalrous devotion without thought of reward. One said to one's self at sight of her: "Think, I will divine your thought; speak, I will obey. If my life, given over to torture, can afford you a day of joy, take my life: I will smile like the martyr at the stake, for I will offer that day to God as a pledge which a father redeems in gratitude for a fête given his child."

Many women prearrange their facial expression and succeed in producing effects similar to those which the sight of the countess would have produced on you; but with her everything was the result of a captivating natural grace, and that grace went straight to the heart. If I speak to you thus, it is because our sole concern is with her thoughts, the delicate sentiments of her heart, and you would have blamed me if I had not sketched her for you.

I well-nigh forgot my rôle as a quasi-lunatic, rough-mannered, far from chivalrous.

"I am told, madame, that you are fond of flowers?"

"I am a flower-maker, monsieur," she replied. "After raising the flowers, I copy them, like a mother who is enough of an artist to enjoy painting her children. Need I say more plainly that I am poor and not in a position to pay for the concession I ask of you?"

"And how is it," I rejoined, with magisterial gravity, "that a woman so distinguished as you carries on such a trade? Have you, I wonder, like myself, reasons for keeping your fingers busy in order not to let your head work?"

"Let us remain upon the division wall," she replied with a smile.

"But we are at the foundation," said I. "Surely I must know which of our two sorrows, or, if you prefer, our two manias, ought to give way to the other? — Ah!

what a pretty bunch of narcissus! they 're as fresh as the morning!"

I give you my word that she had formed a sort of museum of flowers and shrubs, which the sun alone could enter, the arrangement of which was guided by artistic genius, and which the most unfeeling of landowners would have respected. Masses of flowers, arranged in terraces or clumps with the skill of a professional florist, produced effects soothing to the soul. That peaceful, solitary garden exhaled a consolatory balm, and inspired only pleasant thoughts and alluring, even sensuous, images. One recognized there the unmistakable signature which our real character writes upon everything, when nothing forces us to resort to the various (and necessary) hypocrisies that society demands.

I looked at the clump of narcissus and the countess in turn, seeming more enamoured of the flowers, in order to carry out my rôle.

"So you are fond of flowers?" she said to me.

"They are," said I, "the only beings who do not betray our care and our affection."

I delivered such a vehement tirade in demonstrating a parallel between botany and society, that we found ourselves a thousand leagues from the division wall, and the countess must have taken me for a poor, wounded, suffering creature, deserving of pity. Nevertheless, after half an hour, she brought me back, naturally, to the question; for women, when not in love, are as cool as an old solicitor.

"If you wish to let the paling remain," I said to her, "you will learn all the secrets of floriculture that I am trying to conceal; for I am after the blue dahlia, the blue rose — I am mad over blue flowers. Is not blue the favorite color of beautiful souls? We are neither of us on our own prop-

erty: it would be as well to put up a little open gate to connect our gardens. You love flowers: you will see mine, and I yours. If you receive no visitors, I never have any one but my uncle, the curé of the Blancs-Manteaux."

"No," she said, "I prefer not to give any one the right to enter my garden at all hours. Come when you please, you will always be received as a neighbor with whom I desire to live on friendly terms; but I am too fond of my solitude to burden it with any conditions whatsoever."

"As you please," I replied.

And I leaped the paling at a bound.

"What 's the use of a gate?" I cried when I was on my own land, turning toward the countess and mocking her with the gesture and grin of a madman.

For the next fortnight I gave no sign that I was thinking of my neighbor. Toward the end of May, one lovely evening, it happened that we were on opposite sides of the paling, walking slowly. On reaching the end, we could not avoid exchanging some words of courtesy. She found me so profoundly distressed, plunged in such painful meditation, that she talked of hope, tossing me phrases that resembled the lullabies with which nurses sing children to sleep. Thereupon I passed through the hedge and stood beside her a second time. She asked me into the house, wishing to assuage my sorrow.

And so at last I entered that sanctuary where everything was in perfect harmony with the woman I have tried to describe to you. An exquisite simplicity reigned therein. In the interior the pavilion was a perfect specimen of the *bonbonnière* invented by the art of the eighteenth century for the dainty orgies of a *grand seigneur*. The dining-room, on the ground-floor, was decorated with frescoes representing trellises covered with flowers, of beautiful and

marvellous workmanship. The cage of the staircase was charmingly done in camaieu. The small salon, opposite the dining-room, was sadly dilapidated; but the countess had hung tapestries taken from old screens, covered with fanciful designs. There was a bath-room adjoining. Above, there was but one room with its dressing-room, and a library metamorphosed into a workshop. The kitchen was out of sight in the basement under the pavilion, which was reached by a short flight of steps. The balustrade of the gallery and its garlands of flowers *à la Pompadour* concealed the roof, of which one saw only the lead of the ridge-pole.

In that abode one could imagine one's self to be a hundred leagues from Paris. But for the bitter smile that sometimes played about the pale-faced woman's beautiful red lips, one would have believed that this violet buried in her forest of flowers was happy. In a few days we reached a measure of confidence engendered by proximity, and by the countess's certainty of my complete indifference to women. A single glance would have endangered everything, and I never had a thought for her in my eyes! Honorine chose to look upon me in the light of an old friend. Her manner toward me was dictated by a sort of compassion. Her looks, her voice, her words, everything proved that she was a thousand miles from the coqueties that even the most rigidly virtuous woman might have allowed herself to indulge in under such circumstances.

She soon gave me the privilege of entering the charming work-room where she made her flowers — a retreat full of books and curiosities, arrayed like a boudoir; its sumptuousness gave relief to the roughness of the tools of her trade. The countess had, in due time, poetized, so to speak, a thing which is the antipodes of poesy — a work-

shop. Of all the kinds of work that women can do, the making of artificial flowers is perhaps the one whose details enable them to display the most grace. To color pictures a woman must sit bending over a table and devote herself with close attention to that sort of semi-painting. Tapestry, made as a woman must make it who would earn a livelihood thereby, is a cause of lung disease or of curvature of the spine. The engraving of music-plates is one of the most exacting kinds of work because of its fineness, and the care and understanding that it demands. Dressmaking and embroidery do not bring in thirty sous a day. But the making of flowers and of caps necessitates a multitude of motions, and of ideas, too, which keep a woman in her proper sphere: she is herself, she can talk or laugh or sing or think.

Surely there was the instinct of a true artist in the way the countess had arranged on the long table of yellow fir, the myriads of colored petals which were to make up the flowers she had decided upon for the day. The cups for the colors were always clean and so arranged that the eye could find at once the desired shade. Thus the noble artist economized her time. In a pretty ebony cabinet, inlaid with ivory, there were a hundred Venetian drawers containing the steel matrices with which she cut out her leaves or petals. A superb Japanese bowl held the glue, which was never allowed to stiffen; she had fitted a hinged cover to it, so light that she could raise it with the end of her finger. The wire and brass were out of sight in a small drawer of her work-table, in front of her.

Immediately under her eyes, in a Venetian glass, stood the living model of the flower she was trying to imitate, in full bloom and erect on its stalk. She was ambitious to produce chefs-d'œuvre, she attacked the most difficult



tasks — bunches of grapes, the tiniest blossoms, heather, nectarines of the most fantastic shading. Her hands, as active as her thought, flew to and fro from her table to her flower, like those of a pianist on the keys of a piano. Her fingers seemed to be enchanted, so skilfully did they conceal by the grace of their movements the various processes of torsion, application, and pressure required in that work, apportioning each movement to the desired result with the unerring accuracy of instinct.

I was never tired of watching her mount a flower when the different parts were collected before her, and stuff the stalk with cotton and fasten the leaves to it. She displayed the genius of a great painter in her bold undertakings; she copied withered leaves and faded flowers; she wrestled with the wild flowers, which are the simplest of all and the most complicated in their simplicity.

"This art is in its infancy," she said. "If Parisian women had a little of the genius that the slavery of the harem demands of Oriental women, they would ascribe a whole language to the flower they wear on their heads. For my own artistic gratification, I have made withered flowers with leaves of the color of Florentine bronze, such as we find just before or just after the winter. Would such a wreath, on the head of a young woman whose life is a failure, or who is consumed by secret chagrin, lack poetic suggestiveness? How many things a woman could say with her head-dress! Are there not flowers for drunken Bacchantes, flowers for harsh and frowning bigots, and careworn flowers for women who are bored? Botany, in my opinion, expresses all the thoughts and sensations of the soul, even the most intimate!"

She employed me in cutting out her leaves, in trimming them, and in preparing wire for the stalks. My assumed

desire for distraction soon made me skilful. We talked as we worked. When I had nothing to do, I read the new books to her, for I had to bear in mind my rôle, and I acted the man tired of life, worn out by disappointments, morose, bitter, sceptical. My personal appearance was responsible for many delightful jests touching the purely physical resemblance, less the club-foot, between Lord Byron and myself. It was tacitly assumed that her misfortunes, as to which she chose to maintain the most profound silence, overshadowed mine, although the reasons for my misanthropy might have satisfied Young and Job.

I will say nothing of the feeling of shame which tormented me for attributing to my heart, like the beggars in the street, pretended wounds, in order to excite that adorable woman's compassion. I soon realized the extent of my devotion by dint of appreciating the utter baseness of a spy. The tokens of sympathy that I received would have afforded ample consolation for the greatest misfortune. That charming creature, detached from the world, who had lived alone so many years, had, outside of love, treasures of affection to bestow, and she offered them to me with a childlike effusion, with a tender pity, which would of a surety have filled with bitterness a rake who had fallen in love with her; for, alas! she was all charity, all compassion. Her renunciation of love, her horror of what is called happiness for a woman, were manifested with no less force than sincerity.

Those happy days satisfied me that the friendship of women is greatly superior to their love. I had forced her to extort from me the disclosure of my woes with as much affectation of reluctance as young women like to indulge in before seating themselves at the piano, so well do they

foresee the ennui that is certain to follow. As you can imagine, the necessity of overcoming my repugnance to speak had compelled the countess to draw closer the bonds of our intimacy; but she found in me so faithful a replica of her own antipathy to love, that I thought that she was delighted with the hazard that had sent to her on her desert island a sort of Man Friday. Perhaps solitude was beginning to be irksome to her. However, she was absolutely without coquetry, she had nothing left of the woman; she was conscious that she had a heart, she told me, only in the imaginary world in which she sought refuge. Involuntarily I contrasted those two lives: the count's, all action, excitement, commotion; the countess's, all passivity, inaction, immobility.

Both man and woman obey with admirable docility the tendencies of their nature. My misanthropy justified me in cynical outbursts against men and women alike, and I ventured upon such outbursts, hoping to lure Honorine on to the path of confessions; but she refused to step into any trap, and I began to understand the "mulish obstinacy" which is more common among women than is supposed.

"The Orientals are right," I said to her one night, "to shut you women up, looking upon you as nothing more than the instruments of their pleasures. Europe is well punished for admitting you as a part of society, and accepting you on a footing of equality. In my judgment woman is the most dishonest and cowardly creature conceivable. And, indeed, that is the very source of her charms; what sport is there in hunting a domestic animal? When a woman has aroused a passion in a man, she is always sacred to him; in his eyes she is clothed with an inalienable privilege. In man, gratitude for bygone

pleasures is everlasting. Later if he meets his mistress, and finds her unworthy of him, she still has a claim upon his heart; but with you women a man whom you have once loved is nothing at all; nay, more, he commits an unpardonable sin in continuing to live! You dare not admit it, but you all have in your hearts the thought which the popular calumny known as tradition attributes to the lady of the Tour de Nesle: 'What a pity that one can't live on love as one lives on fruit! and that, when the feast is over, one need retain anything more than the sense of the pleasure enjoyed!'"

"God," she replied, "has reserved such perfect bliss for Paradise, doubtless. But, although your argument may seem very clever to you, to me it has the misfortune to be false. What sort of creatures are those women who indulge in several love-affairs?" she demanded, looking as Ingres's Virgin looks at Louis XIII when he offers her his kingdom.

"You are a sincere actress," I replied; "you just hurled a glance at me that would make your reputation on the stage. But, beautiful as you are, you must have loved; therefore, you forget."

"I," she rejoined, evading my suggestion, "I am not a woman, I am a nun who has reached the age of seventy-two."

"How then can you declare with such assurance that you feel more keenly than I do? For women misfortune has only one form: they reckon as misfortunes only disappointments of the heart."

She looked at me with a sweet expression, and did as all women do who, when caught between the two horns of a dilemma or seized by the claws of truth, persist none the less in their purpose: she said to me:—

"I am a nun, and you talk to me about a world in which I can never again set foot."

"Not even in thought?" I asked.

"Does the world deserve envy?" said she. "Oh! when my thoughts wander, they go higher. The angel of perfection, the beautiful Gabriel, sings often in my heart. If I were rich, I would work none the less, in order not to soar aloft too often on the angel's shimmering wings, and disport myself in the realm of fantasy. There are thoughts which destroy us women! I owe to my flowers great peace of mind, although they do not always succeed in engrossing me. Some days my whole being is invaded by anticipation of I know not what; I cannot banish a thought that takes possession of me and seems to benumb my fingers. I fancy that some great event is impending, that my life is about to be changed; I listen in the silence, I gaze into the darkness, I am disinclined to work, and, after wearing myself out in thought, I find life — life as it was before. Is it a warning from Heaven? That is what I ask myself?"

After three months of conflict between two diplomats concealed beneath the skin of a melancholy youth and a woman rendered invincible by disgust, I told the count that I considered it impossible to induce that turtle to come out from under her shell. We should have to break the shell. On the preceding day the countess, in the course of our last friendly discussion, had exclaimed: —

"Lucretia wrote with her dagger in her own blood the first word of the charter of womankind: 'Liberty!'"

Thereupon the count gave me *carte blanche*.

"I have sold the flowers and the caps I have made this week for a hundred francs!" cried Honorine joyfully one Saturday evening when I joined her in the little salon

on the ground floor, the gilding of which had been refurnished by the supposed landlord.

It was ten o'clock. A July twilight and a magnificent moon shed their misty light. Puffs of blended odors soothed the spirit. The countess was jingling in her hand the five gold pieces given her by a fictitious dealer in hats, another confederate of Octave's, whom a judge, Monsieur Popinot, had found for him.

"To earn one's living while enjoying one's self," she said; "to be free, when men, armed with their laws, have sought to make us slaves! Ah! I have these outbursts of pride every Saturday. In fact I love Monsieur Gaudissart's gold pieces, as well as Lord Byron, your double, loved John Murray's."

"It is hardly a woman's rôle," I observed.

"Pshaw! Am I a woman? I am a young man endowed with a tender heart, that's all; a man no woman can torment."

"Your life is a contradiction of your whole personality," I rejoined. "How can it be that you, upon whom God lavished his most exceptional treasures of love and beauty, do not sometimes wish —"

"What?" she asked, disturbed by a phrase which, for the first time, seemed at odds with my rôle.

"A pretty child with curly hair, running about among these flowers like a flower of life and love, calling, 'Mamma!'"

I awaited a reply. A silence rather too prolonged was the cause of my discovering the terrible effect of my words, which the darkness had hidden from me at first. Half reclining on her couch, the countess had not fainted, but was frozen as it were by a nervous paroxysm, whose first shudder, gentle like everything that emanated from her,

resembled, she told me later, the first sensation caused by the subtlest of poisons. I called Madame Gobain, who came and carried her mistress away, laid her on her bed, unlaced and undressed her, and restored her, not to life but to the consciousness of horrible suffering. I walked back and forth, weeping, on the path in front of the pavilion, very doubtful of my success. I determined to abandon the rôle of bird-snarer, which I had so inconsiderately undertaken. Madame Gobain, having come down and found me with my face wet with tears, ran quickly upstairs again and said to the countess:—

“Whatever has happened, madame? Monsieur Maurice is crying like a child.”

Stimulated by the thought of the interpretation that might be placed on our attitude toward each other, she mustered superhuman strength, put on a peignoir and came down to me.

“You are not responsible for this attack,” she said; “I am subject to spasms, a sort of cramp in the stomach.”

“And you wish me to say nothing about your unhappiness?” I said, wiping away my tears, and in the tone that cannot be feigned. “Have n’t you just told me that you have been a mother, and that you had the misfortune to lose your child?”

“Marie!” she cried abruptly, ringing the bell.

La Gobain appeared.

“Bring lights and tea,” she said, with the aplomb of a great lady panoplied with pride by that horrible Britannic education that you are familiar with.

When La Gobain had lighted the candles and closed the blinds, the countess presented an unspeaking face to me; already her indomitable pride, her barbarian’s gravity, had resumed their sway.

"Do you know why I am so fond of Lord Byron?" she asked me. "He suffered as the beasts suffer. Of what use is lamentation when it's not an elegy like Manfred's, bitter irony like Don Juan's, or a reverie like Childe Harold's? No one will ever know anything of me! My heart is a poem which I offer to God!"

"If I chose —" said I.

"If?" she repeated.

"I take no interest in anything," I replied; "I am not inquisitive; but if I chose I would know all your secrets to-morrow."

"I defy you to do it!" she retorted, with ill-disguised anxiety.

"Do you mean it?"

"Assuredly," she replied, shaking her head, "I must know if such a crime is possible."

"In the first place, madame," said I, pointing to her hands, "those dainty fingers, which tell me plainly enough that you are not an unmarried woman, were they made for hard work? In the second place, you call yourself Madame Gobain, although only the other day, when a letter was handed you, in my presence, you said to Marie: 'Here, Marie, it's for you.' Marie is the real Madame Gobain. So you are concealing your name under your housekeeper's. O madame, have no fear of me. You have in me the most devoted friend you will ever have. *Friend* — do you understand? I give to that word its touching, sacred meaning, so profaned in France, where we christen our enemies with it. This friend, who would defend you against everything, would also have you as happy as a woman like yourself ought to be. Who can say that the pang I have involuntarily caused you was not a deliberate act?"



"Go on," she rejoined, with portentous boldness; "be inquisitive, I insist upon it, and tell me all that you are able to learn about me. But," she added, raising her finger, "you will also tell me by what means you obtain this information. The preservation of the little happiness I enjoy here depends upon your conduct."

"That means that you will fly?"

"On the wings of the wind," she cried, "and to the new world!"

"Where you will be," I rejoined, "at the mercy of the brutality of the passions you will inspire. Is it not of the very essence of beauty to shine, to attract men's eyes, to arouse desires and evil instincts? Paris is the desert without the Arabs; Paris is the only place on earth where one can conceal one's existence and live by one's own work. Of what do you complain? What am I? an additional servant, a Monsieur Gobain, nothing more. If you have a duel to fight, you may need a second."

"No matter — find out who I am. I have already said: *I insist!* now, I beg," she said, with a grace — which you ladies all have at command.

"Very well: to-morrow, at this time, I will tell you what I have discovered," I replied. "But do not hate me! Will you act like other women?"

"What do other women do?"

"They bid us make tremendous sacrifices, and, when they are made, they blame us for them sooner or later as an insult."

"They are right, if what they have asked of you seem to you to be *sacrifices*," she retorted slyly.

"Substitute the word 'efforts' for 'sacrifices,' and —"

"That would be an impertinence," she said.

"Forgive me," I replied; "I forgot that woman and the Pope are infallible."

"Mon Dieu!" she said, after a long pause, "two words can disturb this tranquillity I have bought so dear, and which I enjoy as by fraud."

She rose, paying no heed to me.

"Where can I go?" she said. "What will become of me? Must I leave this pleasant retreat, arranged with such pains to end my days in?"

"To end your days in!" I repeated with visible dismay. "Have you never reflected that there will come a time when you can no longer work, when the price of flowers and caps will be lowered by competition?"

"I have saved three thousand francs already," she replied.

"Great Heaven! how many deprivations does that sum represent?" I cried.

"Leave me, until to-morrow. To-night I am not myself; I want to be alone. Must I not collect all my strength, in case anything goes wrong? For, if you know anything, others besides you must also know, and then — Adieu!" she added, shortly and with an imperative gesture.

"To-morrow the combat," I rejoined with a smile, in order to keep up the appearance of indifference which I had assumed during this scene.

But as I walked down the long avenue, I repeated: —

"To-morrow the combat!"

And the count, whom I met, as always, on the boulevard, echoed my words: —

"To-morrow the combat!"

## VI.

OCTAVE'S anxiety was equal to Honorine's. Until two o'clock in the morning he and I paced back and forth along the moats of the Bastille, like two generals who, on the eve of a battle, reckon up all the chances, examine the ground, and conclude that the victory depends upon seizing a favorable opportunity in the midst of the conflict. Those two human beings, separated by violence, were destined to keep vigil that night, one in the hope, the other in deadly fear, of a reunion. The dramas of life do not consist in circumstances but in sentiments; they are enacted in the heart, or, if you prefer, in that vast world which we call "the spiritual world." Octave and Honorine lived and moved only in that world of great spirits.

I was prompt. At ten o'clock in the evening, I was admitted for the first time to a charming white and blue chamber, the nest of that wounded dove. The countess looked at me, tried to speak to me, but was dumfounded by my respectful manner.

"Madame la comtesse," I began, smiling gravely.

The poor woman, who had risen, fell back in her chair, and sat there in a grief-stricken attitude which I would have liked some great painter to seize.

"You are," I continued, "the wife of the noblest and most highly esteemed of men, a man who is considered great, but who is much greater in his relation to you than he is in the eyes of the world. You and he are two great

characters. — Where do you think that you are?" I asked her.

"In my own house," she replied, her eyes wide open and staring with amazement.

"In Comte Octave's house!" I said. "We have been tricked. Monsieur Lenormand, the usher of the court, is not the real landlord, he has simply lent his name to your husband. The extraordinary tranquillity that you enjoy is the count's work, the money you earn comes from the count, whose protection extends to the most trivial details of your life. Your husband has saved you in the eyes of the world; he has supplied plausible reasons for your absence, and ostensibly he indulges a hope that you were not lost in the wreck of the *Cécile*, the vessel on which you sailed for Havana, to secure the inheritance of an old kinswoman who might have forgotten you; you sailed with two women of his family and an old steward. The count says that he has sent agents to the locality of the wreck, and that he has had letters that give him much hope. He takes as many precautions as you take yourself to conceal you from all eyes. In short, he obeys you —"

"Enough," she interrupted. "I only want to know one thing more. From whom did you learn these details?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! madame, my uncle obtained a secretary's berth with the commissioner of the police of this quarter for a young man without means. That young man told me the whole story. If you should leave this pavilion to-night, secretly, your husband would know where you went, and his protection would follow you everywhere. How could a sensible woman ever believe that dealers could pay her as much for flowers and caps

as they ask for them? Ask three thousand francs for a bouquet, and you will get it! Never was a mother's affection more ingenious than your husband's. I learned from the concierge here that he comes often and stands behind the hedge, when everything is quiet, to gaze at the light of your night-lamp. Your long cashmere shawl is worth six thousand francs. Your dressmaker sells you *old things* that come from the best factories. In short, you are like Venus in Vulcan's net; but you are imprisoned alone, and by the devices of a sublime generosity, which has been no less sublime every hour for seven years."

The countess trembled like a captured swallow, which stretches out its neck from the hand that holds it, and looks about, wild-eyed. She was shaken by a nervous convulsion and eyed me suspiciously. Her dry eyes emitted a gleam that almost burned. But she was a woman! there came a moment when the tears forced their way to the light, and she wept; not that she was touched — she wept because of her helplessness, she wept with despair. She had thought that she was free and independent, and marriage was as great a burden to her as his prison to the prisoner.

"I will go," she said through her tears; "he drives me to it. I will go, you may be sure, where no one will follow me!"

"Ah!" I said, "you mean to kill yourself. — Look you, madame, you must have very weighty reasons for being unwilling to return to Comte Octave."

"Oh! I have, indeed!"

"Well, tell them to me, tell them to my uncle; you will have in us two devoted advisers. Although my uncle is a priest in the confessional, he never is in a salon. We

will listen to you and try to find a solution of the problems you propound to us; and if you are the dupe or the victim of some misunderstanding, perhaps we shall be able to put an end to it. Your soul seems to me to be pure; but if you have made a mistake, you have thoroughly expiated it. At all events, remember that you have in me a most sincere friend. If you wish to escape from the count's tyranny, I will furnish you with the means, and he will never find you."

"Oh! there's the convent," she said.

"True, but the count, being a minister of State, would see to it that no convent on earth would receive you. Although he is very powerful, I will save you from him; but only when you have satisfied me that you cannot, that you ought not to go back to him. Oh! don't believe that you would fly from his power only to fall into mine," I continued, as she shot at me a heart-rending glance of distrust and exaggerated dignity. "You shall have peace, solitude, and independence; in short, you shall be as free and as highly respected as if you were an ugly and malicious old maid. Even I myself shall not be permitted to see you without your consent."

"How so? by what means?"

"That, madame, is my secret. I am not deceiving you; be assured of that. Prove to me that this sort of life is the only one that you can lead, that it is preferable to the life of the Comtesse Octave, rich and honored, in one of the finest houses in Paris, beloved by her husband, a happy mother — and I acknowledge myself beaten."

"But," she said, "is there a man on earth who will understand me?"

"No," I replied; "and so I have called upon religion to be our judge. The curé of the Blancs-Manteaux is a

saint of seventy-five. My uncle is not the Grand Inquisitor, he is St. John; but he will become a Fénelon for you — the Fénelon who said to the Duc de Bourgogne: ‘Eat veal on a Friday, but be a Christian, monseigneur!’”

“Go, monsieur; the convent is my last resource, and my only refuge. Only God can understand me. No man, not even St. Augustine, the most tender-hearted of the Fathers of the Church, could sympathize with the scruples of my conscience which are, to my mind, the impassable circles of Dante’s *Inferno*. Another man than my husband, another, however unworthy he was of the gift, has had all my love! No, he did not have it, for he did not take it; I gave it to him as a mother gives her child a wonderful toy which the child breaks. There are not two loves for me. There are some hearts in which love is not subject to coercion: it either exists or does not exist. When it is born, when it shows its head, it is absolute. Well, that life of eighteen months was to me as a life of eighteen years; I put forth all the powers of my being; they were not diminished by their effusion, but they were exhausted in that deceptive intimacy in which I alone was sincere. In my case the cup of happiness is neither emptied nor empty; it cannot be filled again, for it is shattered. I am hors de combat, I have no weapons left. After giving myself thus absolutely, what am I? the remains of a fête. They gave me but one name, Honorine, as I had but one heart. My husband had the young girl, an unworthy lover had the woman, and there is nothing left! Allow myself to be loved! those are the wonderful words you are going to say to me. Oh! I am still something, and I sicken at the thought of being a prostitute! Yes, I saw clearly by the light of the conflagration; and, look you — I can conceive of

yielding to another man's love; but to Octave? Ah! never!"

"But you love him," I said.

"I esteem and respect and revere him; he has never done me the least injury; he is kind, he is tender-hearted; but I cannot love again. — But let us say no more about it," she continued. "Discussion belittles everything. I will give you my ideas on this subject in writing; for at this moment they suffocate me; I am in a fever, my feet are in the ashes of my Paraclet. All that I see, these things that I thought I had procured by my labor, remind me now of all that I wished to forget. Ah! it means that I must fly from here as I fled from my house."

"To go where?" I asked. "Can a woman exist without a protector? At thirty years of age, in all the splendor of your beauty, endowed with powers that you do not suspect, will you go from here to live in the desert where I can conceal you? Set your mind at rest. The count, who has not once shown his face here in five years, will never force his way in without your consent. You have his noble life for nine years as a guaranty of your tranquillity. So that you can deliberate in perfect security with my uncle and me concerning your future. My uncle is as powerful as a minister of State. So be calm and do not exaggerate your unhappiness. A priest whose head has turned white in the exercise of his priestly functions is no child; you will be fully understood by one to whom all sorts of passions have been confided for nearly fifty years, and who weighs in his hands the overburdened hearts of kings and princes. Although he is stern under his stole, before your flowers my uncle will be as gentle as they, and as indulgent as his divine Master."

I left the countess at midnight, apparently calm, but



gloomy, and with secret projects which no perspicacity could foresee. I found the count only a few steps away, on rue Saint-Maur, for he had left our usual meeting-place on the boulevard, being drawn toward me by an irresistible force.

"What a night the poor child has before her!" he said, when I had finished my tale of the scene that had just taken place. "Suppose I go there; suppose she should see me suddenly?"

"At this moment she is in a state to throw herself out of the window," I replied. "The countess is one of those Lucretias who do not survive an assault, even when it comes from a man to whom they would give themselves."

"You are young," said he. "You do not know that the will, in a mind excited by such painful reflections, is like the surface of a lake over which a hurricane passes: the wind changes every minute, and the current sets now toward one shore, now toward the other. To-night there are as many chances that at sight of me Honorine would throw herself into my arms as that she would jump out of the window."

"And you would risk that alternative?"

"Let us go," he replied; "I have something at home to enable me to wait till to-morrow night; a dose of opium that Desplein prepared for me so that I could sleep without danger!"

The next day at noon La Gobain brought me a letter and said that the countess, worn out with weariness, had gone to bed at six o'clock, and that, thanks to an *amandé* prepared by the druggist, she was asleep.

Here is the letter; I have kept a copy of it; for, mademoiselle [here the consul turned to Camille Maupin], you know the resources of art, the stratagems of style, and the

efforts of many writers who show no lack of skill in their writings; but you will agree that literature could not find such sentences as these in its artificial entrails; there is nothing so terrible as the true. This is what that woman, or, rather, that living sorrow, wrote to me.

“MONSIEUR MAURICE, —

“I know all that your uncle could possibly say to me; he is no better instructed than my conscience. Conscience in man is God’s interpreter. I know that if I am not reconciled with Octave I shall be damned; such is the sentence of the religious law. The civil law enjoins obedience upon me under any circumstances. If my husband does not reject me, all is said: the world esteems me pure and virtuous, whatever I may have done. Yes, there is this much sublime about marriage, that society ratifies the husband’s pardon; but it has forgotten that the pardon must be accepted. Legally, religiously, and in the opinion of society, I should return to Octave. To confine ourselves to the question of humanity alone, is there not something heartless in denying him happiness, in depriving him of children, in removing his family from the Book of Gold of the peerage! My sorrows, my sentiments, my repugnance, all my selfishness (for I know that I am selfish), must be sacrificed to family. I shall be a mother, and my children’s caresses will wipe away many tears! I shall be very happy, I shall surely be held in honor, I shall go about, wealthy and haughty, in a brilliant equipage. I shall have servants, a palace, a country-house, I shall be the queen of as many festivities as there are weeks in the year. Society will welcome me cordially. In short, I shall not reascend to the heaven of the patriciate because I shall not have descended from it. Then God, the law, society — all are in agreement. Against what do you rebel? I shall be asked from the sky, from the pulpit, from the bench, and from the throne, whose intervention would, if need were, be invoked by the count. Your uncle will even speak to me, at need, of a certain celestial grace which will overflow my heart when I shall feel the pleasure of having done my

duty. God, the law, society, Octave, all want me to live, do they not? Well, if there is no other obstacle, my reply solves the whole question: I will not live! I shall become innocent, white as snow, once more, for I shall be in my winding-sheet, adorned with the irreproachable pallor of death. There is not a trace of *mulish obstinacy* in this. The mulish obstinacy, of which you jestingly accused me, is, in woman, the result of certainty, a vision of the future. Even if my husband, through love, is so sublimely generous as to forget everything, I shall not forget! Does forgetting depend on ourselves? When a widow marries, love makes a young girl of her, for she marries a man she loves; but I cannot love the count. That is the whole story, do you see! Whenever my eyes meet his, I shall see my sin in them, even when they are overflowing with love. The greatness of his generosity will bear witness to the greatness of my crime. My glances, always anxious, will be always reading an invisible condemnation. I shall have in my heart confused memories which will do battle with one another. Never will marriage kindle in my being the painful joys, the deadly delirium of passion; I shall kill my husband by my coldness, by comparisons which will be divined although hidden in the lowest depths of my consciousness. And oh! on the day when, in a contraction of the brow, in a melancholy glance, in an imperceptible gesture, I shall detect an involuntary reproach, even though repressed, then nothing will hold me back: I shall lie with my head crushed on pavements which I shall find more clement than my husband. My sensitiveness will perhaps be responsible for that horrible but grateful death. I shall die, it may be, because Octave is vexed by some business matter, or because I am misled by an unfounded suspicion. Alas! perhaps I shall take a proof of love for a proof of contempt. What doubly cruel torture! Octave will always be suspicious of me, I shall always be suspicious of him. I shall oppose to him, quite involuntarily, a rival unworthy of him, a man whom I despise, but who once made me to know delirious joys engraved in letters of fire, which I am ashamed of, but which I cannot help recalling.

“Have I opened my heart to you sufficiently? No one,

monsieur, can prove to me that love ever begins anew, for I cannot and will not accept any man's love. A young girl is like a flower that one plucks; but a guilty woman is a flower over which people have walked. You are a florist and you should know whether it is possible to restiffen that stalk, to revive those faded colors, to coax back the sap into those delicate tubes, all of whose vegetative power comes from their perfect straightness. If a botanist should devote himself to the operation, would that man of genius succeed in smoothing out the folds of the rumpled tunic? He would make over a flower — he would be God! God alone can make me over! I am drinking the bitter cup of expiation; but while drinking it I have spelled out with anguish this sentence: 'To expiate is not to efface.' Alone in my pavilion I eat bread dipped in my tears; but no one sees me eating it, or sees me weeping. To return to Octave is to abandon weeping; my tears would insult him. O monsieur! how many virtues one must trample under foot in order, not to give one's self, but to give one's self back, to a husband whom one has betrayed! Who can count them? God alone, for he alone is the confidant and suggester of those terrible refinements of sensibility which must make his angels turn pale.

"Stay, I will go further. A woman is brave before a husband who knows nothing; then she displays in her hypocrisies a savage strength; she deceives in order to impart a twofold happiness. But reciprocal certainty — is not that degrading? Must I exchange humiliation for ecstasy? Would not Octave come at last to consider my consent a sort of depravity? Marriage is founded upon esteem, upon sacrifices made on both sides; but neither Octave nor I could esteem the other on the morrow of our reunion: he would dishonor me by an old man's passion for a courtesan, and I should be perpetually ashamed of being a thing instead of a lady. I shall not be virtue in his house, but sensual pleasure. Such are the bitter fruits of a sin. I have made for myself a marriage-bed whereon I can only toss about on burning coals — a sleepless bed. Here I have hours of tranquillity, hours when I forget, but in my fine house everything will remind me of the

stain that dishonors my bridal dress. When I suffer here, I bless my sufferings, I say to God, 'I thank thee!' But, under his roof, I shall be always afraid, tasting delights to which I am not entitled.

"All this, monsieur, is not argument, it is the conviction of a heart of vast extent, for it has been hollowed out by grief for seven long years. And lastly, must I make this shocking confession? I constantly feel my bosom bitten by a child conceived in intoxicating bliss, in the hope of happiness, by a child whom I nursed for seven months and with whom I shall be quick all my life. If other children draw their sustenance from me, they will drink tears which, mixed with my milk, will turn it sour. I seem to you frivolous, childish. Ah! yes, I have the memory of the child, the memory that returns on the brink of the grave. And so, you see, there is not one element of this alluring life, to which the world and a husband's love seek to lead me back, which is not false, which does not conceal snares for my feet, which does not open abysses before me where I am torn and bruised by pitiless rocks. For five years I have been travelling through the trackless moors of my future, unable to find a spot convenient for my repentance, for my soul is overwhelmed by true repentance. To all this religion has its replies ready, and I know them by heart. This suffering, these perplexities are my punishment, it says, and God will give me the strength to endure them. That, monsieur, is a sufficient reason for pious souls, blessed with an energy which I lack. Between the hell where God will not forbid me to bless His name, and the hell that awaits me at Comte Octave's, my choice is made.

"One last word. I should choose my husband again, if I were a young girl and if I had had my present experience; but that is precisely the reason of my refusal — I do not choose to blush before him. Think of it! I shall be always on my knees, he always standing! And if we change our positions, he seems to me contemptible. I do not want to be treated more kindly by him because of my wrong-doing. The angel who would dare to commit certain brutalities which both husband and wife allow themselves to indulge

in when they are both beyond reproach, that angel is not on earth, but in heaven! Octave is full of delicacy, I know; but there are not in his soul (however great you may make it out, it is a man's soul) guarantees for the new life I should lead under his roof. Come, therefore, and tell me where I can find the solitude and peace and silence, propitious to irreparable misfortunes, which you promised me."

After taking this copy of the letter, in order to have my file complete, I went to rue Payenne. Anxiety had overcome the power of opium. Octave was pacing his garden like a madman.

"Answer this," said I, giving him his wife's letter. "Try to remove the fears of this sophisticated modesty. It is a little more difficult than to take by surprise modesty which knows nothing of itself and which curiosity betrays to you."

"She is mine!" cried the count, whose face expressed greater and greater joy as he progressed in the reading.

He motioned to me to leave him alone, feeling that he was being spied upon in his joy. I understood that extreme grief and extreme felicity obey the same laws. I went to receive Madame de Courteville and Amélie, who were to dine with the count that day. Lovely as Mademoiselle de Courteville was, I realized, on seeing her again, that love has three faces, and that the women who inspire an all-engrossing love are very rare. Involuntarily comparing Amélie and Honorine, I found more fascination in the sinning woman than in the pure girl. To Honorine fidelity was not a duty, but the fatal destiny of the heart; whereas Amélie would serenely enter into solemn engagements without understanding their scope or the obligations they involved. The worn-out, *quasi*-deceased woman, the

sinner to be lifted up, seemed sublime to me; she aroused the natural generous instincts of mankind, she asked of the heart all its treasures, of power all its resources; she filled life to overflowing, she kindled a conflict in the midst of happiness; whereas Amélie, chaste and trustful, was about to confine herself within the sphere of placid motherhood, where earth to earth would be the only poetry, where my wit would find neither contest nor reward of victory.

As between the level fields of Champagne and the snow-capped, tempestuous, but sublime peaks of the Alps, what young man can choose the chalky, peaceful plain? Such comparisons are ill-advised and fatal on the threshold of the mayor's office. Alas! one must have had experience of life to know that marriage debars passion, that the family cannot have the storms of love for its foundation. After dreaming of impossible love with its innumerable chimæras, after tasting the cruel joys of the ideal, I had before my eyes a modest reality. Pity me, I pray you! At twenty-five, I had doubts of myself; but I formed a manful resolution. I returned to the count on the pretext of informing him of his cousins' arrival, and I found him made young again in the reflected light of his hopes.

"What is it, Maurice?" he asked, struck by the change in my expression.

"Monsieur le comte — "

"You don't call me Octave! you to whom I shall owe life and happiness."

"My dear Octave, if you succeed in inducing the countess to return to her duties — I have studied her closely" (here he looked at me as Othello should look at Iago, when the latter succeeds in instilling the first suspicion in the

Moor's mind), "and she must never see me again, she must never know that you had a Maurice for your secretary. Never mention my name and let no one remind her of it, or all will be lost. You have had me made a master of requests; well, get me some diplomatic post, a consulate, somewhere abroad, and don't think any more about my marrying Amélie. Oh! never fear," I continued, seeing the start he gave, "I will play my part to the end."

"Poor boy!" he said, taking my hand and squeezing it, and forcing back the tears that moistened his eyes.

"You gave me gloves," I rejoined, with a laugh, "and I have put them on, that's all."

We agreed thereupon what I was to do that evening at the pavilion. It was August; the day had been hot and stormy, and the storm was still in the air; the sky was like copper, the perfume of the flowers oppressed one with a sense of heaviness; I felt as if I were in an oven and surprised myself wishing that the countess had sailed for the Indies.

But she was dressed in white muslin, with shoulder-knots of blue ribbon; her hair was unadorned and her curls fell beside her cheeks. She was sitting on a wooden bench built like a couch, in a sort of arbor, her feet on a little wooden stool and protruding several inches beyond her dress. She did not rise, but pointed to a seat beside her, saying:—

"Is n't it true that there is nothing in life for me?"

"In the life that you have made for yourself," I replied, "but not in the life that I wish to make for you; for, if you choose, you may be very happy."

"How, pray?"

Her whole person asked the question.

"Your letter is in the count's hands."



Honorine sprang to her feet like a doe taken by surprise, gave three bounds, made the circuit of the garden, stood still a few seconds, and finally went and sat down by herself in her salon, where I found her when I had given her time to become accustomed to the pain of that dagger-thrust.

"You, a friend! Say rather a traitor — a spy of my husband's perhaps!"

In a woman, instinct is equivalent to the perspicacity of great men.

"Your letter requires an answer, does it not? and there is but one man in the world who can write it. So you will read the answer, dear countess, and if you find no object in life after reading it, the spy will prove to you that he is a friend; for I will put you in a convent from which all the count's power will not remove you. But before we come to that, let us listen to the other side. There is a law, divine and human, which even hatred makes a pretence of obeying, and which bids us not condemn without hearing the defence. Thus far you have condemned, as children do, stuffing your ears. A devotion of seven years' standing has its rights. So you will read the reply your husband writes. I sent him by my uncle a copy of your letter, and my uncle asked him what his reply would be if his wife should write him a letter in those terms. So you are not compromised. The excellent man will bring the count's letter himself. In the presence of that holy man and myself, out of regard for your own dignity, you must read the letter, or you will be no better than an angry, sullen child. You will make this sacrifice to the world, to the law, and to God."

As she could see in that concession no impairment of her woman's will, she consented. All our labor of four or

five months had been done in preparation for that moment. But do not the pyramids terminate in a point upon which a bird perches? The count staked all his hopes upon that supreme hour, and it had arrived.

I can think of nothing in all my life more awe-inspiring than my uncle's appearance in that Pompadour salon at ten o'clock in the evening. His head, whose silvered locks were set in relief by his costume all of sober black, and his divinely placid face, produced a magical effect upon Comtesse Honorine; she felt as if a cooling balsam were poured upon her wounds; she was illuminated by the reflection of that unconsciously resplendent virtue.

"Monsieur le curé des Blancs-Manteaux!" announced La Gobain.

"Have you come with a message of peace and happiness, dear uncle?" I asked.

"One always finds peace and happiness in obeying the commands of the Church," replied my uncle, handing the countess the following letter: —

"MY DEAR HONORINE, —

"If you had done me the favor not to doubt me, if you had read the letter I wrote you five years ago, you would have saved yourself five years of hard work, and privations which have distressed me beyond words. I proposed to you a compact, the terms of which removed all your apprehensions and made it possible for us to live together. I have every reason to reproach myself bitterly, and I have discovered all my mistakes in seven years of wretchedness. I did not understand marriage aright. I was unable to detect peril when it threatened you. An angel was in my house, and the Lord had said to me, 'Watch over her carefully!' The Lord has punished my rash confidence. You cannot deal yourself a single blow without striking me. Have pity for me, my dear Honorine! I so thoroughly

understand your sensitiveness that I have not planned to take you back to the old house on rue Payenne, where I can live without you, but which I could never look upon again with you. I am refurnishing with the keenest delight another house in Faubourg Saint-Honoré, to which, strong in hope, I am taking, not a wife whom I owe to ignorance of life, a wife acquired by virtue of the law, but a sister who will allow me to bestow upon her brow the kiss that a father gives to the daughter whom he blesses every day. Will you deprive me of the right I have succeeded in winning over your despair — the right to provide near at hand for your needs, your pleasures, your very life? A woman has a heart always full of excuses — her mother's heart; you never knew any other mother than mine, who would have brought you back to me. But how have you failed to divine that I had both my mother's heart and your own pleading for you? No, my dear, my love is neither base nor niggardly; it is one of those that do not give vexation time to distort the features of a beloved child. For what do you take the companion of your childhood, Honorine, that you deem him capable of accepting faltering kisses, of sharing his heart between pleasure and anxiety? Do not fear that you will have to endure the lamentations of a begging passion; I have sought you only after satisfying myself that I can leave you entirely at liberty. Your pride, in your solitude, has magnified obstacles; you can, if you choose, look on at the life of a brother, or father, without joy and without suffering; but you will encounter neither mockery, nor indifference, nor distrust of your intentions. The temperature of the atmosphere in which you will live will be always mild and equable, without storms, with no possibility of a squall. If, later, having become fully assured that you are as completely at home as you are now in your pavilion, you wish to introduce other elements of happiness — diversions of whatever sort — you can enlarge your circle at your pleasure. A mother's affection knows neither scorn nor pity; what is it? love without desire. Even so in me admiration will conceal all those sentiments which you might look upon as insults. Thus

we can both lead noble lives side by side. On your part the kindness of a sister, the caressing spirit of a friend, will satisfy the ambition of him who would fain be your companion, and you will be able to gauge his affection by the efforts he will make to conceal it from you. Neither of us will be jealous of the past, for we can acknowledge in each other the good sense to look only ahead. So there you are, in your own house, all that you are now on rue Saint-Maur: inviolable, alone, occupied however you please, guiding your conduct by your own laws; but you have in addition a lawful protector, whom at this moment you are compelling to perform labors suited to the most romantic passion; also the consideration which gives so much lustre to a woman; and means enough to enable you to do so much in the way of charity.

"Honorine, when you desire a penance that is absolutely unnecessary, you will come and ask for it; it will be imposed on you neither by the Church nor by the Code, but will depend on your pride, on your own initiative. My wife might have reason to dread all that terrifies you, but not the friend and sister whom I am bound to treat with all the respect and delicacy which courtesy demands. To see you happy is enough for my happiness; I have proved that in these seven years. Ah! Honorine, the pledges of my truth are written on all the flowers you have made, which I have preciousy preserved and watered with my tears, and which, like the *quipos* of the Peruvians, are a narrative of our sorrows.

"If this secret compact does not commend itself to you, my child, I have requested the holy man who takes charge of this letter not to say a word in my behalf. I desire to owe your return neither to the terrors that the Church might hold over you, nor to the commands of the law. I choose to receive from yourself alone the simple and modest happiness that I seek. If you persist in compelling me to lead the melancholy life, bereft of even a sister's smile, that I have led for nine years past; if you remain in your desert, alone and immovable, my determination will bend before yours. Understand: you will be annoyed no more than you have been hitherto. I will have

that lunatic turned out of his house who has interfered in your affairs, and perhaps distressed you."

"Monsieur," said Honorine, ceasing to read her letter, which she placed in her bosom, and looking at my uncle, "I thank you; I will avail myself of monsieur le comte's permission to stay on here."

"Ah!" I exclaimed.

That exclamation procured me an anxious glance from my uncle, and from the countess a sidelong, crafty one which enlightened me as to her motive. She had desired to find out whether I was an actor, a bird-snarer, and I had the melancholy satisfaction of misleading her by my exclamation, which was one of those outcries of the heart that women interpret so accurately.

"Ah! Maurice," she said, "*you* know how to love!"

The gleam that flashed from my eyes was another response that would have banished the countess's uneasiness if she had retained any. Thus the count made use of me to the last moment.

Honorine then took out the letter as if to finish it. My uncle made me a sign, and I rose.

"Let us leave madame," I said.

"Are you going already, Maurice?" said she, without looking at me.

She rose and followed us, still reading, and at the door of the pavilion she took my hand, pressed it most affectionately, and said:—

"We shall meet again."

"No," I replied, squeezing her hand so that she almost cried out. "You love your husband! To-morrow I go."

And I rushed from the house, leaving my uncle behind.

“What is the matter with your nephew, pray?” she asked him.

The poor abbé completed my work by pointing to his head and his heart as if to say, “Forgive him, madame, he is mad!” much more truly than he supposed.

## VII.

A WEEK later I left France with my appointment as vice-consul at a large mercantile city in Spain, where I might in a short time fit myself for the duties of a consul, to which my ambition was confined. After my installation, I received this letter from the count:—

“MY DEAR MAURICE,—

“If I were happy I should n’t write to you; but I have begun another life of sorrow; I have become young again in desire, with all the impatience of a man on the verge of forty, and with the wisdom of a diplomatist who is able to moderate his passion. When you went away, I had not been admitted to the pavilion on rue Saint-Maur; but I had been promised permission to go there, in a letter, the sweet and melancholy letter of a woman who dreaded the excitement of an interview. After waiting more than a month, I ventured to call, sending La Gobain up to ask if I might hope to be received. I sat down on a chair in the avenue, near the concierge’s lodge, with my head in my hands, and there I stayed nearly an hour.

“‘Madame wanted to dress,’ said La Gobain, to conceal beneath a coquetry flattering to me Honorine’s irresolution.

“For fully quarter of an hour we were both attacked by an involuntary nervous trembling, as violent as that which attacks an orator in the tribune, and we addressed each other in timid sentences, like people taken by surprise who make a pretence of conversing.

“‘Come, Honorine,’ I said, with my eyes full of tears, ‘the ice is broken, and I am so tremulous with joy that

you must overlook the incoherence of my language. It will be like this for a long while.'

"'It is not a crime to be in love with one's wife,' she replied with a constrained smile.

"'Do me the favor not to go on working as you have been doing. I know from Madame Gobain that you have been living for three weeks on your savings; you have sixty thousand francs a year of your own, and, if you do not give me back your heart, do not, I pray you, leave your fortune on my hands.'

"'It's a long while,' she said, 'that I have been aware of your kindness.'

"'If it is your choice to remain here,' I replied, 'and to retain your independence; if the most fervent love finds no favor in your eyes, at least do not work any more.'

"I handed her three certificates, each for twelve thousand francs a year; she took them, opened them carelessly, and after reading them, Maurice, she just looked at me by way of reply. Ah! she realized well enough that it was not money I was giving her, but liberty.

"'I am conquered,' she said, holding out her hand, which I kissed; 'come and see me as often as you choose.'

"So, you see, she received me only by putting force upon herself. The next day I found her armed with factitious gaiety, and it took me two months to become so accustomed to her that I could make out her real character. But then it was like a lovely month of May, a springtime of love that gave me ineffable delight; she was no longer afraid, she was studying me. But, alas! when I proposed that we should go over to England for the purpose of a pretended reunion, and then return to resume her rank and live in her new house, she was terror-stricken.

"'Why not live like this always?' she asked.

"I submitted without a word.

"'Is this a test?' I asked myself as I left her.

"On my way from my own house to rue Saint-Maur I became excited, thoughts of love swelled my heart, and I would say to myself, like a young man: —

"'She will yield to-night.'



"But all this farce, real or artificial, vanished at a smile, at a command from her proud, tranquil eyes, unaltered by passion. Those terrible words of hers which you repeated to me: 'Lucretia wrote with her dagger in her own blood the first word of woman's charter: "Liberty!"' came to my mind and turned me cold. I felt convincingly how essential Honorine's consent was, and how impossible it was to extort it from her. Did she divine those tempests of emotion which perturbed me no less on returning home than when on my way to her? I finally set forth my plight in a letter, abandoning the idea of speaking to her of it. Honorine did not answer the letter, but she was so sad that I acted as if I had not written. I suffered keenly because I had had the heart to distress her; she read my sensations and forgave me. I will tell you how. Three days ago she received me for the first time in her blue and white chamber. It was full of flowers, gaily decorated and brightly lighted. Honorine was dressed in a way that made her simply entrancing. Her hair framed with its light curls the face that you know; in her hair she wore heather from the Cape; her dress was of white muslin, with a sash with long, floating ends. You know what she is in such simplicity of attire; but that day she was a bride, she was the Honorine of the early days. My joy was frozen instantly, for her face wore a terribly serious expression; there was fire beneath that ice.

"'Octave,' she said, 'whenever you choose, I will be your wife; but understand, this submission has its perils; I can resign myself —'

"I made a gesture.

"'Yes,' she continued, 'I understand: the idea of resignation is offensive to you, and you want what I cannot give — love! Religion, compassion, have led me to renounce my vow of solitude, and you are here!'

"She paused.

"'At first,' she went on, 'you asked for nothing more; now, you want your wife. Very well, I give you back Honorine such as she is, and without deceiving you as to what she will be. What will become of me? Shall I be a mother? I long for it. Oh! believe me, I long for it with

all my heart. Try to transform me — I consent; but if I die, my dear, do not curse my memory, and do not accuse me of obstinacy for what I should call worship of the ideal, if it were not more natural to call the indefinable sentiment that will kill me, the worship of the divine! The future will cease to be any concern of mine; you will have the responsibility for it — so reflect.'

"With that she sat down, in the serene attitude which you learned to admire, and watched me turn pale under the anguish she had caused me. My blood ran cold. When she saw the effect of her words, she took my hands, held them in hers, and said: —

"I do love you, Octave, but not in the way you want to be loved; I love your heart. But be assured that I love you well enough to die in your service, like an Eastern slave, without a regret. That will be my atonement.'

"She did more: she knelt on a cushion at my feet, and in an outburst of sublime compassion, she said: —

"After all, perhaps I shall not die!'

"For two months I have been fighting. What am I to do? My heart is too full, so I have sought a friend's heart to hurl at it that question, what am I to do?"

I did not answer the letter. Two months later the newspapers announced the arrival, by steam-packet, of the Comtesse Octave, restored to her family after adventures which were described so naturally that no one cast a doubt on them. On my arrival at Genoa I received an announcement of the countess's successful lying-in, and the birth of a son. I held the letter in my hands two hours, sitting on yonder bench on the terrace. Two months later, being worried to death by Octave and Messieurs de Grandville and de Sérizy, my patrons, and prostrated by the loss of my uncle, I consented to marry.

Six months after the Revolution of July, I received this letter, which brings the story of that couple to an end: —

“MONSIEUR MAURICE, —

“I am dying, although I am a mother — perhaps because I am a mother. I have played my rôle of wife conscientiously: I have deceived my husband, I have had joys as genuine as the tears shed by an actress on the stage. I am dying for society, the family, marriage, as the first Christians died for God. I don’t know of what I am dying; I try in good faith to find out, for I am not obstinate; but I am desirous to describe my disease to you, who brought me the divine physician, your uncle, to whose words I bowed. He was my confessor, I nursed him in his last illness, and he pointed out to me the road to Heaven, bidding me continue to do my duty. And I have done my duty. I do not blame those who forget; I admire them as strong characters, and necessary in this world; but I have the weakness of remembering too well! That love of the heart which identifies us with the beloved object — that love I have been unable to feel twice. Until the last moment, as you know, I cried to your heart, to my husband, and in the confessional, ‘Have pity on me!’ All were pitiless. — Well, I am dying. I am dying with an exhibition of unexampled courage. Never was courtesan more cheerful than I. My poor Octave is happy: I let his love feast on the mirages of my heart. In this terrible game I put forth all my powers; the actress is applauded, fêted, overwhelmed with flowers; but the invisible rival comes every day to seek his prey, a fragment of my life. Rent as I am, I smile! I smile upon two children, but the older, the one that is dead, triumphs! As I have told you, the dead child is calling me, and I am going to him. Intimacy without love is a situation in which my heart feels itself degraded every hour. I cannot weep or abandon myself to reflection except when I am alone. The demands of society and of my household, the care of my child and of Octave’s welfare, do not leave me a moment to renew my strength and courage as I found time to do in my solitude. The constant alert always takes my heart by surprise. I have not been able to accustom myself to the necessary vigilance, quick of ear, false-tongued, and lynx-eyed. It is not a beloved mouth that drinks my tears and blesses my

eyelids; my tears are dried by my handkerchief; it is water, not lips that I adore, that cools my inflamed eyes. I am an actress with my heart, and perhaps that is why I am dying. I confine my grief so carefully that no trace of it appears outside; it must gnaw at something and it is attacking my life. I said to the doctors who discovered my secret:—

“Ascribe my death to some plausible disease; otherwise I shall take my husband with me.”

“So it is agreed between Messieurs Desplein, Bianchon, and myself that I am dying of a softening of some bone or other, which science has minutely described. Octave thinks that I adore him—do you understand? So that I am afraid that he will follow me. I am writing to you to beg you, in that case, to be the young count’s guardian. You will find with this a codicil in which I express that desire; you will make use of it only when it may be necessary, for perhaps I am too conceited. Perhaps my hidden devotion will leave Octave inconsolable, but living! Poor Octave! I wish him a better wife than I am, for he deserves to be dearly loved. Since my clever spy has taken a wife, let him remember what the florist of rue Saint-Maur bequeaths him as weighty advice: ‘Let your wife become a mother speedily! immerse her in the most commonplace household concerns; prevent her from cultivating in her heart the mysterious flower of the ideal, the celestial perfection in which I believed, that enchanted flower of brilliant hues, whose odor inspires distaste for life’s realities. I am a St. Theresa who has been unable to nourish herself upon ecstatic bliss in a convent with the divine Jesus, with a blameless winged angel to come and fly away opportunely. You saw me happy amid my beloved flowers. I have not told you all: I saw love blooming beneath your pretended mania, and I concealed from you my thoughts, my poetic imaginings; I did not admit you to my beautiful realm. However, you will love my child for love of me, if he should be left some day without his poor father. Keep my secrets as the grave will keep me. Do not weep for me: I have been dead a long while if it is true, as St. Bernard said, that there is no life where there is no love.’”

"And," said the consul, putting the letters in his portfolio and locking it, "the countess died."

"Is the count still living?" asked the ambassador; "for he has disappeared from the political stage since the Revolution of July."

"Do you remember, Monsieur de Lora," said the consul-general, "seeing me on the way to the steamboat with —"

"With a white-haired man — an old man?" said the painter.

"An 'old man' of forty-five, going to Southern Italy in search of health and distraction. That old man was my unfortunate friend, my patron, who came to Genoa to bid me adieu and to place his will in my keeping. He makes me his son's guardian. I did not need to tell him of Honorine's wish."

"Does he know that he's a murderer?" inquired Mademoiselle des Touches.

"He suspects the truth," replied the consul, "and that is what is killing him. I stayed aboard the steamboat which was taking him to Naples until we were outside the roadstead; a small boat was to take me ashore. We spent some time over our leave-takings which, I fear, are eternal. God knows how dearly one loves the confidant of his love, when she who inspired it is no more! 'Such a man,' said Octave, 'possesses a charm, he is surrounded by a halo.' Standing in the bow, the count gazed at the Mediterranean; it was a fine day, by chance, and, moved doubtless by the spectacle, he bequeathed these last words to me: —

"'In the interest of mankind should we not try to find out what this irresistible power is that impels us to sacrifice a divine creature to the most fleeting of pleasures, and

in opposition to our good sense? In my conscience I heard outcries. Honorine was not the only one who cried out. And I insisted! I am consumed by remorse! I was dying on rue Payenne of the joys I had not; I shall die in Italy of the joys I have known! What is the source of the lack of harmony between two natures which, I dare to say, were equally noble?"

For several minutes there was absolute silence on the terrace.

"Was she virtuous?" the consul asked the two women.

Mademoiselle des Touches rose, took the consul's arm, led him a few steps apart, and said to him:—

"Are not men blameworthy, too, for coming to us, for making young girls their wives, while keeping angelic images in the depths of their hearts, comparing us to unknown rivals, to perfections taken from the memory of more than one, and finding us always inferior?"

"You would be right, mademoiselle, if marriage were based on passion; and that was the error of those two who will soon be no more. Marriage with a love of the heart shared by husband and wife would be paradise."

Mademoiselle des Touches left the consul and was joined by Claude Vignon, who whispered to her:—

"He's rather conceited, this Monsieur de l'Hostal."

"No," she replied, and added this in Claude's ear: "He has n't guessed yet that Honorine would have loved him. Oh!" she exclaimed, as she saw the consul's wife approaching, "his wife has been listening—the wretch!"

The clock struck eleven and all the guests returned to the city on foot, along the shore.

"All that is not real life," said Mademoiselle des Touches. "That woman was one of the rarest exceptions,

and perhaps, in intelligence, the most abnormal; a pearl! Life consists of diversified incidents, of alternate sorrows and joys. Dante's *Paradiso*, that sublime expression of the ideal, that never-fading blue, is found only in the heart, and to demand it of the ordinary things of life is an extravagance against which Nature protests every hour. For such hearts the six feet of a convent cell and a *prie-Dieu* are enough."

"You are right," said Léon de Lora. "But, good-for-nothing as I am, I cannot help admiring a woman capable as she was of living beside a studio, under the roof of a painter, without ever going down either to see the world or to get splashed in the street."

"Such a thing has been seen for several months past," observed Claude Vignon with profound sarcasm.

"The Comtesse Honorine is not the only one of her sort," said the ambassador to Mademoiselle des Touches. "A man, yes, a statesman, and a venomous writer, was the victim of a love of that description, and the pistol-shot that killed him did not reach him alone: the woman he loved has become a nun to all intent."

"So that there are still some great souls in this age!" said Camille Maupin; and she stood for several minutes, lost in thought, leaning against the pier-head.

PARIS, January, 1843.





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